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THE BOARDWALK

BY

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"THE WISHING-RING MAN," "THE OLD
ROAD TO PARADISE," ETC.



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To

DOCTOR JAMES FRANCIS ACKERMAN
BEST AND KINDEST OF DOCTORS AND FRIENDS

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FOREWORD

THE BOARDWALK

It begins by the Allenwood flume, where the little boys go to catch herring in the spring. It stretches down for about two miles, diving through the 'Arches Pavilion, where the young lovers go to look at the water on lonely days when they hope they will not be disturbed.

Further on it passes Knockers' Row, where the middle-aged women sit and tell each other their thoughts about the passersby. Then comes Wesley Pavilion, circled with booths and full of dancers in summer, most desolate of all places in the winter. Then it goes in a wide outward circle, as if it were not over-religious, around the roofed place in the Grove where the praise meetings are held; more lumpily and bumpily, for the Grove authorities are canny souls. They do not replace their part of the Boardwalk as often as the Park Council, which handles money not its own and hence votes it away royally for improvements.

After that it passes the Grove pier, where the

old men sit fishing benignantly, not so much interested in their catch as pleased to be out in the air with the sun and the sea.

It is like a pattern of life.

In summer it is crowded. The gaily dressed people surge up and down it in a long, sauntering procession. It is strung with colored lights that from sea look like a long necklace of jewels. "It's a lovely Boardwalk," the summer people say with all the rapture of their two weeks off. We, waiting a little impatiently for them to go, answer with a trained courtesy—for are summer people not our livelihood?—that seems a trifle bored.

We are not bored; blasé, a little perhaps, with the tawdrily exciting summers we have known since babyhood. But the Boardwalk is our life; and one doesn't make amiable compliments about one's life.

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THE BOARDWALK

CHANGELING

BACK in the days when Theodora Woods and the rest of us were growing up, the Park was less the tawdry Shopgirls' Delight it is now. It was still known as an excellent place to bring up the children. There were daisy fields and sand meadows between the jewel-like little lakes, and in these grew enchantingly wild strawberries and white violets and dog roses and goldenrod and anemones, at their proper seasons, for the children to pick. You never needed to think of children, though, from one meal to the next, for the place was so safe then that you could send a twelve-year-old daughter on an errand at night through a lonely mile of closed summer cottages, down to the little cluster of living lights that were the village shops, knowing that she would meet nothing worse than loneliness coming or going.

The Woods family settled there, like most other all-the-year-round people, because their past was a failure, and because the Park was a new little summer resort with a future. Mr. Woods had tried a half-dozen things, from salesmanship to grocery-storekeeping, without exactly putting anything

through, and the Park offered him a fresh chance. He was always beginning fresh chances; he was a rather pompous, ineffective little man, Theo's father, strutting over any trifle that came his way, very proud of his position as head of the family (it really belonged to his wife), and especially proud of his wild flame of a fifteen-year-old daughter. He might well be, though she never seemed to be in the least his doing. But his attitude apparently was that her attributes were merely a development and setting forth of his own. She seemed to the rest of us like a princess in a peasant's hut. But then there is no adoration like the adoration you give some wonderful friend at fifteen.

The eldest of four in a maidless family may well be a drudge, and often is. But Theo wasn't. She did her full share of the housework, but she whisked it through much more competently than did Avalene, the next sister, though Avalene was a plain and patently industrious child who stayed lumpily at home and seemed to toil a good deal. Theo, on the contrary, never seemed to be doing anything hard, though she stood high in her classes in a way that tempted her teachers to drive her. But work, school or home, to gay, vivid young Theo, was something to be hastened lightly through and forgotten.

The real business of her full and interesting life was having a good time with the boys.

It was an innocent, if vulgar, good time that Theo and her mates had with their lovers at Juliet's age. They never touched—indeed, they scarcely knew about—the lower stratum of girls, those who went to the school across the track, and whose good times sometimes descended below vulgarity. The little Radnor Beach girls, or the dingily-gay little souls who lived in “flats” in the business district—you crossed such every day on the boardwalk, but you did not think about them. You kept very proudly to your own “set.”

Theodora, and a string of girls belonging to the carefully demarcated “set” of that year, would march down to the boardwalk after school, shoulders scornfully back and arms linked, laughing excitedly and chattering about the “boys.” They would meet these, friends or acquaintances, linked in a like row, patrolling the boardwalk in an opposite direction, likewise with a certain scorn in their demeanor. There would be a lifting of shoulders, or a louder giggle than usual, at the encounter, and some brave spirit would cast a mocking word to the row of the other sex. After the second, or perhaps the third crossing, the linked rows would fuse, stretching all

across the walk or breaking into pairs, as the fashion of the moment happened to be for "crowds" or "twosing."

It was "twosing" the June before Theo was sixteen, the time when her life was at its highest tide.

To grown people a girl of fifteen and a half is a child still; to herself she is very old and very real; more real, perhaps, than ever before or after, even the average girl of that age.) And Theodora was not average. She was like a girl of eighteen, physically and mentally. Her personality made an impact that you could not forget.

She was something of a marvel to most people, coming from her rather dingy, middle-class small-town family; but the probable explanation is that she was a throwback. There was in the family a strain of very good and vigorous English adventuring blood.

Gramma Coburn had run away with Grampa Coburn, she being a Squire's daughter of Devon, and he what the Squire referred to until death as "that damn bagman." They had, of course, come to America, where the English used to suppose caste to be non-existent, and drifted finally into farming. The two old people, with an old-maid daughter, dwelt on a farm near Red Bank, very much of a

piece as far as outward appearance went. Sometimes Gramma scolded Grampa, but on the whole they got on as well as the average. Gramma was tall and very brown and gaunt and wrinkled, with false teeth and an unashamed devotion to red flannel, and Theo and Avalene found it much easier to be romantic about her when she was out of their sight. She did not look like the aristocratic old ladies in English novels.

But one thing she had done for Theo, at least; her authentic Elizabethan forbears, the Sir Ralphs and Captain Basils and Mistress Theodoras, all adventurous and arrogant, world-wanderers and court beauties before their twenties were near, had come alive again in this Theodora. She had a whip of yellow hair in the wind, long sapphire-colored eyes that were insolent when they did not laugh, and the tall, straight, beautifully-built body that most Park girls had for a heritage, living as they did outdoors between wind and water all summer. Theo had also the Elizabethan combination of brilliant intellect and brilliant gaiety. Mind and body, she was all alive, and the world was hers to play with. She stood out in our minds like an electric light among candles, and carried us along like a gay, ruthless young whirlwind. Her attitudes, her mannerisms, stuck in

our minds and set the copy for us. She knew it, half consciously, and it made her gayer and more princesslike. She ruled still as the winter came on, thrilled with her own triumphs.

Her father, eyeing her, felt a little uneasy, and as if anyone so exultant as that with life must be in the wrong. Her mother thought, doubtless with wisdom, that Theo must be overtiring herself. So one evening, after a long discussion, they spoke to her about it. That is, her father did—in quite the wrong way, of course.

“ You been running around with the boys too much,” he said, crossly, over his paper, when she came in from a party, calling back a gay good-by to an unseen boy at the door. “ That’s what it is. You’ll get talked about. Why can’t you behave decently, like Naomi Ainslie or Olive Jardine? You don’t see a string of boys chasing around *them*.”

There was a half-reluctant pride in his girl’s prowess even in her father’s snarl. Theo felt it, though the warning in his words pricked her sensitively-clean mind uneasily, and sowed a little terror there. She flung back her victorious young yellow head and answered as pertly as any Mistress Marian behind her :

"They'd be glad enough to have the boys if they got a chance. I don't see why you need to worry. I'm going to be valedictorian when we graduate from High this February, if you call that neglecting my lessons. I'm way ahead in my classes. I'm making my graduating clothes, three dresses. And I do lots more round the house than Avie, and you don't nag *her*."

This was all so true that her father flew into one of his quick little nasty tempers.

"I forbid you to go to any more parties, or be out of this house after eight, any more till you graduate. Your health won't stand it, and, anyway, I'm not going to have folks talking."

Her mother, heavy, judicial and kind, backed up her husband at this point. All the studies and parties and the sewing were telling on Theo.

"You got to stop burning the candle at both ends, dear. Come, you've lots of time ahead of you. You can afford to wait till you're grown up for your good times."

It was all so old—so stale! Theodora, vibrant as an overstrained violin string, vivid as a flaring candle, was all the more rebellious because she knew that when her mother took a hand rebellion was useless.

"I may never have another good time as long as I live," she fought, backed against the big old engraving of Washington crossing the Delaware, which decked the dining-room where they sat. Her eyes and lips burned bright. Youth and sex-power and life were at their height in her, and she wanted to go on using them. She meant no evil—she knew nothing much about evil. Only our Northern convention of deferred youth pressed hard upon her, and she wished to continue her innocent, exciting conquests of High School boys, her rule over the girls. And her people talked about having her wait to grow up!

She looked angrily from one to the other of them, sitting dully at the red-covered dining-table. And she felt inarticulately, without knowing that she felt it, that she was alive and they were not. Her father was twitching in his sandy, irritable nervousness, jerking at his shabby mustache with one blunted-nailed, knotty hand. Her mother sat steadily sewing at little Milly's new petticoat, stolid and tidy in her dowdy brown henrietta with its tatting collar and steel buttons. Avalene, over in her corner, stolid apparently also, and gabbling principal exports half aloud, was gloating, Theo knew, behind her sheltering geography. Theo stood among them, a de-

faint young princess. But she had to give in, and she knew it.

"I have to do what you say," she conceded sullenly. "I suppose I can go over to Naomi Ainslie's to get my Latin in the evenings? Our room's cold as ice, and everybody makes such a noise down here I can't think. You can take me there, if you like, to see that I don't misbehave on the way," she ended defiantly.

"No impudence, miss," snapped her father, as Theo flung out of the room. The sense of brightness that her presence always brought went with her, and the room was suddenly a less interesting place. Her father, his gust of temper over, smiled at his wife across the red-checked tablecloth.

"Smart as they make 'em!" he said proudly; and Avalene jerked her clumsy shoulders resentfully. What was the use of being good and obedient and hardworking if . . .

But she was as much under Theo's spell as the rest, and the next night, when Theo came back from her Latin studies, wind-flushed and warm, though Avalene heard the muffled clink of skates in her sister's school bag, she never thought of telling on Theo. But she very well knew where her sister had been.

When the ice on the lake bore, every boy and girl in the Park spent every free moment on it. It was especially modish in Theo's set to go skating at night, and everything of importance that befell you happened then. Avalene, by the way, had no temptation to go; her especial friends skated in the afternoons. She could see that it was asking a good deal of Theo to deprive herself of the principal pleasure of the time merely because of a silly ukase from Grown People. Clarence Griggs, the druggist's son, and Naomi Ainslie and Martha Atchison, respectively the doctor's and the Lutheran minister's daughter, did, it was known, stay home because they were told to. And girls like Catherine James and Corinna Goldthwaite, little daughters of a remnant of aristocracy over on the outskirts of Allenwood, came down decorously with governesses once in a while for us to look at with a careless curiosity. But we gave such, when we thought about them, a scornful pity on account of their trammels, which it was suspected they felt. They were removed entirely, to our mind, from life and living. They were "out of things."

Theo, skimming down the ice, hand-in-hand with her chum, Leila Graves, was *in* things. She was in things up to the hilt—in fact, she was a large part

of them. Leila Graves was her second in command, red-cheeked, black-ringleted, sophisticated and self-assured as only a hotel-keeper's daughter can be at fourteen, but withal good natured, honest and a worshiper of Theo's. She had her own train. So when Theo deserted her for Ethan Ferrier, after the first tingling half hour of stars and ice, she promptly stole his brother, Quincy, from Hetty Christie; it wasn't difficult, because Hetty was only in that set on sufferance, being on the borderland that led to the despised "across-the-track" girls. The boys took her about because her muddy skin and scarlet lips had a strong charm of their own, and the girls tolerated her because she was very demonstrative and very meek. But she knew her place, and merely went home with fury in her heart, Tommy Brock tagging in *her* train. But Tommy was of a still lower caste, being a Radnor Beach boy. We had many distinctions in our world of the Third Year High.

Love reigned on the ice that night, the child love that people laugh at, watching, and sigh over, looking back. Everyone set to partners, more or less. But it was a very real love—love at first sight—between Ethan Ferrier and Theodora Woods. He was seventeen then and she fifteen, but they

never either of them knew anything like it afterwards.

The Ferriers were newcomers in town. Ethan was a tall, shy boy with a face that seemed stolid till you saw his eyes. They were the blue, sharply-intelligent, deep-set eyes that go with the New England conscience. His people were impoverished New England gentlefolk, relatives of Dr. Ainslie, the Lutheran clergyman; they had come to the Park, like most of its citizens, for a fresh start. Everybody wondered why Theo, who could have had anybody for a beau, preferred silent Ethan, with his shy ways and little courteous stammer, to his brother, Quincy, an airy and charming lad with handsome features and much manner. Ethan probably wondered about it himself. Theo did not give her reasons, any more than princesses-regent ever do. Perhaps it was the innate straightness and chivalry of the lad, contrasted with the roughness of the less well-bred boys she had known before. Perhaps it was the deep faithfulness she divined under his inarticulateness. Or it may have been merely the law of contrasts.

It did not occur to the other girls that the Ethan affair was any more important than Theo's earlier ones. She had possessed beaux ever since she was

tiny. Her high spirits, her self-possession, her regnant little way of taking admiration for granted, had made the lads trail after her sheepishly even in the girl-scorning stages. She liked it intensely, of course. If you didn't have boys crazy over you, you lost caste with the other girls. When you had a "case" in the grammar grades you found your name and his name written derisively in chalk on the pavement, and the rest called loudly after you, walking self-consciously home from school together. As you got older the other girls still teased and tried to make you blush, and said, "E'e! She's blushing!" gleefully or angrily, according to whether they wanted your special boy or not, themselves. If your life was boyless you were beneath contempt. They were simply sorry for you.

Theo had enjoyed her small beaux, and kissed them and held hands with them matter-of-factly enough always, under the impression that she was making love. But up to the time she met Ethan she had really only been having a good time in the manner recommended by the conventions she knew. She would have been very crestfallen if anyone had told her so, of course. Her secret ambition, like that of all the rest of her friends, was to be a duplicate of *Airy Fairy Lilian* in The Duchess' work of

that name, which, in torn paper covers, had devastated the Set that fall. Theo was considered, except for her height, very like Lilian. Well, perhaps more like *Molly Bawn*, when you came to discuss it carefully.

But the case of Ethan was more unlike the rest than Theo herself knew. They had fallen desperately and honestly in love during one Latin period, and become formally and thrillingly engaged in the course of the week. Theo made the most of the advances, though neither of them would have believed that if they had been told. They said nothing to their families about it, of course; they would have been laughed at. Naturally they did not give each other this reason, but exchanged vague impressive hints of opposition till each nearly believed the other. They didn't intend to marry right away, anyhow.

"You'll have to go through college first, and I'm going to be a famous artist," Theo laid down the law, and Ethan assented gravely. He never even talked as much as usual when he was with her, because he was so busy thinking about her wonderfulness. She, on the contrary, talked more than usual, because she was so excited at being with him.

Ethan never came to the house; they always met elsewhere. That was nothing against him. Your

beaux never *did* come to the house, except with "the crowd." Your family was all over it, for one thing, and would tease you afterwards. And Theo would have preferred death to being teased about the most beautiful and wonderful thing she had ever known.

It was that high and white First Love which is nearly too sacred to tell the lover about. The first night after they had kissed each other Theo went home and burned up the sample box of pink powder that she'd kept hidden under her silk stockings in the bottom drawer. She wanted to be worthy of him. Under the stimulation of her love for Ethan she gleamed brighter than ever. She got higher marks at school, she flew through her home tasks more efficiently and speedily, singing "The Sweetest Story Ever Told" in an ecstatic voice over the broom and the dishpan. Her cheeks were burning bright all day long, and her jewel-blue eyes were bluer than ever. Her very hair fluffed out more electrically from the short, looped-under plait that she had lately made at the back of her neck.

They went on skating together and walking home from school together, and going off for long hand-in-hand visits in the little glazed-in kiosks along the boardwalk, those places tacitly reserved for love-making. They dreamed and laughed and built fool-

ish beautiful plans; and Ethan's people, the brave little overworked mother and languid gentlemanly father and small adoring sister and the big invalid one, and the gay and poised Quincy, all noticed that Ethan was looking older and carrying himself better, and working harder in and out of High School. All the money the Ferriers could scrape together or borrow was for Quincy, who was to be sent to college. He was the star member of the family. But for a while there was actually some talk of having Ethan try for college, too. The idea died gradually, but he always remembered it of them with gratitude, though when the time came he worked his way through medical school unaided. Ethan was of that burden-bearing type which is seldom planned for by its nearest and dearest.

Once he did begin to tell his mother, a little shyly, about the wonderfulness of Theodora; but she did not pay much attention. It is possible that she was a little jealous. Ethan had always been hers and nobody else's; her only aid in the planning and forethought necessary for the happy-go-lucky others.

"Wouldn't it be a little better if you gave all that time to a boy friend?" was all she said.

So after that Ethan said nothing at all. He was too happy to be chilled, but he fell back on the old

axiom that grown people never understand, anyway.

They had two months or perhaps more of rapture—"walking on air" is the formula that describes it best, perhaps. Then their chances for meeting began to seem insufficient. When you are deeply in love it is hard to be denied long hours alone together. Ethan and Theo grew restive.

One afternoon they had to part an hour before Theo's supper time. She had something to do at home which was inescapable. And they had not half finished what they wanted to say. They agreed to meet on the ice that night and slip away to a rustic seat in the little island which broke the bridge in the middle of Sunrise Lake, and talk some more. They had sat there so much of late that it had become prescriptively their own. It was sheltered from the wind, and you could sit with anyone's arm around you, and not be seen.

After supper Theo was in such a hurry to escape that she was impatient with Avalene, ponderously and thoroughly washing the dishes. And Avalene, stirred to anger in her turn, retorted on her in an incautiously loud voice across the kitchen. Theo was standing at ease by the dresser, ostentatiously waiting to come back to the sink, which she had cleared of dishes, till more should be ready to dry.

"Course you're in a hurry, with your beau waiting for you! If I was you I wouldn't chase off like that every time he lifted his finger! How do you know he wants you?"

Theo was about to reply crushingly, when she saw her father crossing the dining-room to the kitchen door. She pushed it to as if she had not seen him.

"Now you've done it," she said bitterly. "I suppose you're glad."

"Oh, he didn't hear!" answered Avalene, rather frightened. "Not but what he ought to know," she ended virtuously. "But he didn't. See, he didn't come in, nor be cross."

Theo caught her breath, and went on with her dishes, subdued for the moment. Both girls began to talk loudly about the sins of Avalene's teacher, a noted and terrible landmark in school, Theo comparing her past performances with the tales of this year which Avalene had to tell. Their father did not appear, however, and Theo, reassured, washed her hands and furtively dabbed them with violet perfume, collected her Latin books, put them in the school bag above the muffled skates, and went to her tryst. Under the exhilaration of her mood was the little stirring of irrational fright which the high-strung and overworked know. Her father's "Why

can't you behave decently?" of two months before pricked her from the hidden place in her mind where it had been thrust down. She did so want to be the best girl in the world, for Ethan's sake. She wanted to be *dreadfully* good.

"I feel as if you were—a star," he had said to her haltingly that afternoon. When he said things like that it shook her all over, and made her feel grateful and unworthy. It was so hard for him to say things at all.

Then all the nervous dread and overstrain were lost in the rapture of having Ethan skate up to her from where he had been restlessly circling the ice alone, and, after he had knelt and put on her skates, pull her up to her lithe height and sweep with her across the lake.

They circled the lake a couple of times, then made for their nook on the island. The electric lights on the bridge were merciful, and did not shine directly on the bench. It was as near to seclusion as they ever attained, except once in a while in the board-walk summer houses. They kissed each other swiftly and long, cold young cheek against cold young cheek, and then, still interlocked, with their skates flung down beside them, began to talk ardently about their love for each other, and what

they should do about the long stretch of years before them.

"I can't wait!" Ethan broke out. "Let's get married next year. I've worked before, in vacations. There are lots of things I can do."

He had risen and was standing before her. Theo sprang up, too, and answered him ardently.

"I can work, too, Ethan! We can do things just as well after we're married!"

She laughed out in the excess of her happiness, and he laughed down at her. Then he sobered, and bent over to kiss her very slowly.

"You angel!" he said. "I'm not good enough for you."

And as he straightened himself from that reverent kiss, Theo's father caught his shoulder from behind and jerked him aside, snarling at him.

"Go home, you young pup!" was all he said, and turned to attack his daughter.

It is possible that he did not realize himself to be saying much worse things than usual to her. Or perhaps he felt that it needed such words to make an impression on dominant young Theodora. He was just a common, uncontrolled little, bad-tempered man. And then, of course, he was used to having his rages discounted; he was like a child who

is bad because it knows that it will not be taken seriously.

But at all events the things he said to Theo in his unbridled petty rage at having been tricked so long were such as cannot be said to a good girl without breaking her, or making her hate you for life.

He stopped his shrill and outrageous abuse presently, because Theo lay so laxly in his clutch, never answering. It may have taken him aback, for he had expected, of course, defiance, or at most an answering burst of temper. Instead his daughter stood all slumped together, staring like a dead woman, with her face, under the rays of the light, where he had jerked her, wax-white and incredulous. She looked as if she were drowning. Presently her stiff lips moved a little.

“Ethan, Ethan, I’m not . . .” she tried to plead, and could only whisper. And then she saw that he had gone, and shuddered from head to foot. Everything was gone, then.

He was only seventeen, and he had acted automatically; terrified, perhaps, as Theo was terrified. The habit of obedience was probably strong. But he had gone, at that first sharp command. That fact was changeless. And it made Theo certain that he accepted her father’s belief—that he had deserted

her because she really was bad. She was innocent enough to accept the fact herself, this much having happened. She must be wicked if her father told her so before her lover. And if her lover had gone from her, it was because he, too, saw that she was wicked.

Perhaps the crux of the matter lay in the moment her father had taken; a moment when, overtired and overdriven physically and mentally, she was at the highest tension of excitement. Anything pulled taut is more likely to snap.

At any rate, when her father led Theodora home, walking heavily beside him with her head drooping, and the forgotten skates clinking over her arm, it was a changeling he handled. It was still heavily that she went up to her room at her father's surly, relenting, "There, go to bed."

She walked through the open doorway, still dazed with her weight of shamefulness, undressed slowly and with a curious clumsiness, and lay down beside Avalene. She even went to sleep. But in an hour Avalene was awakened by her sister's terrified sobs. Theo was clutching her and moaning that she was afraid of the dark—

"Light a light—please light a light!"

"I suppose that's why you went down cellar Hal-

lowe'en night backwards without any candle,"
Avalene answered, sleepily sarcastic.

But Theo sobbed on, and presently Avalene took the alarm and called their mother, who, being a sensible woman, lighted the lamp immediately. Theo quieted down at that and slept again, though it was an uneasy sleep which disturbed Avalene to the point of annoyance. Next morning Theo was in the same unstrung state; her father's voice, floating up from the dining-room as he made his usual querulous protest about the oatmeal, threw her into a fresh paroxysm of terrified sobbing. Finally they summoned the doctor. It always cheered you up to have Dr. Atchison come in the room. He made you laugh so when he said things about your being sick. Theo looked at him, wondering why she couldn't laugh, and hoping he didn't know how bad she was. It seemed to her strange that he talked to her in as friendly a way as usual.

"Valedictories and parties altogether too much, eh?" he ended, smiling at her. "You must take a rest, child. Mustn't think because a horse will go till it drops, that it won't drop, you know, Mrs. Woods! She's high-strung, and she'd come to a place where all she needed was one more party. I suppose you had it, didn't you, Theo?"

Dr. Atchison's views on too many parties for the adolescent were all the more keen because his own Martha was going to win out in her struggle to go to all the Junior dances, and he knew it.

Theo looked at him dully, and as his cheery voice touched the hurt place in her consciousness—the place her father's outrageous words had lacerated—tears began to slide helplessly down her cheeks once more. After which the doctor patted her, rallied her again, told her that she would be all right soon and might get one party in by May if she was a good girl and kept off the boardwalk for a while; and left, to talk seriously about breakdowns from overstudy, where only Mrs. Woods could hear him. He counseled a stopping short of everything—work, play, excitement—for a while; and a trip away somewhere. The shock of being irrevocably disgraced before the person who mattered most in the world was something he could not bring into his calculations, of course. He might have discounted it, anyway. As Theo or Ethan would have said, he was grown up.

But even Theo herself, wincing at her father's footstep in the days while she was being made ready to go up to Grampa Coburn's and rest, never knew that it was her father who had broken her. She

only expected every unhappy day to be all right to-morrow, and like her old self; and she watched breathlessly and agonizedly for Ethan minute by minute and hour by hour. She lay on the little rep sofa in the front room and stared ceaselessly out of the window, no one but herself knew why.

But Ethan never came.

. . . So he did think she was wicked. . . . There was no hope that he would ever think anything else. . . . She would never have a chance to make the long appealing self-justifications she made in her mind, and said over and over again to herself, changing the phrasings and the beginnings and endings to make it more likely he would accept them. . . . It *was* wicked to kiss boys, and flirt with them, and be shameless and a hussy that lied to everybody, and that no decent man would ever believe in. . . . When the other girls, the ones boys didn't like, like Eloise Gahegan, said she was forward, they had known. It hadn't been cattiness. . . . She cried weakly on her sofa when the time came—about twice a day—that she could bear watching for Ethan no longer. All the spirit and the self-respect was beaten out of her. She went gratefully to the bleak little Red Bank farm, grateful for the chance to crawl off and hide.

They were very kind to her there, of course. But they puzzled over her, the gaunt old English people, pottering about the little rooms. All she would do was to lie on the sofa by the window, as she had at home, and watch, or, as she became stronger, lean at the gate watching. No, there was nobody she expected, she told them—which was as well for her self-respect, because nobody ever came. She had wild dreams how Ethan would come dashing to the door to tell her that it was all a mistake; that he hadn't heard anything her father had said; that he didn't believe any of it; that he had found a way to make lots of money, and soon, when she was sixteen, they should be married. It kept her from going to pieces all over again. But all the while she knew that it wasn't true; that it never would be true. Ethan knew her to be disgraced and worthless and forward. He would never come.

And he never did.

Gradually she got better. Her body was too strong for her not to. Her co-ordination was bad; it never became really good. She dropped things and moved clumsily long afterwards, and she was afraid of the dark, and listless. And she began to be imitative of any one she was near. This, however, led to a good result; she picked up her grand-

'mother's still beautiful, throaty, English voice and accent, instead of the flat New Jersey provincialism she had known before; and despite her struggles not to "put on airs" she never lost it. Finally she went back home, just in time to help pack for another of Mr. Woods' sudden purposeless moves; purposeless, that is, unless a vaguely constant wish to do better somewhere else is to be counted a purpose. They trekked to Jersey City.

The family, when it took time to observe, found her curiously docile. It also felt that she was not interesting any more. When one of the lads of her old suite, greatly daring, came over with his sister to say good-by, she was stiff and shy with him. She was ill at ease, too, with another worshiper encountered down town on an errand. She giggled and jerked out stiff phrases and colored up uncomfortably. The light of her had gone out.

One of these boys simply forgot her noiselessly. The other, being more interested in his emotions, decided that he must have matured greatly without knowing it, to have recovered so completely from his little affair. He was very cocky about it among his mates after the Woods had moved away, and the other boys, not having seen the changeling Theo, envied him. Some of them cherished memo-

ries of her long after they were grown and married and should have been very wise.

As for Ethan Ferrier, he went his way, rather more quietly than usual. He said nothing about Theo to any one, and as he was not of the type with which liberties are taken, no one said anything to him. He went on working in vacations to help support the family, and keeping his mouth tighter and tighter shut. And presently the Ferriers, too, moved from the Park. That was the way of the Park; every one moved away sooner or later, though they were equally sure to be drawn back again.

Life went on in a rather small and uninteresting fashion so far as the Woods family were concerned. Theo got older and forgot about Ethan and didn't jump if her father spoke suddenly, and presently took a business college course at the increasingly sensible Avalene's instigation. Avalene herself went successfully through library school and secured an excellent position, while Theodora got a book-keeper's place in New York. By the time they were twenty-four and twenty-six they were supporting the family, as Avalene had foreseen they would have to, because Mr. Woods became several more kinds of a failure as the years gave him opportunity.

Somewhere along those years he was moved to relate one day as a good joke that he had burned a dozen letters to Theodora, and, finally, to himself, from Ethan Ferrier, about the time Theodora had her breakdown.

“Why, papa, you shouldn’t have done that!” his wife said, and Theodora felt a shadowy sense of injury, and said,

“Well, I think I might have seen them after I got well, anyhow!”

Avalene said competently,

“Nonsense, what would you do with a pack of kid love-letters?” and Theo answered shamefacedly, “Well, they might be funny.”

The family discussed the question a little while longer, for small things were of interest in that uneventful household, and forgot about it. But the general opinion was that Avalene was right—as it usually was. She had taken the helm of that rather inefficient home.

She had matured into a poised, loud-voiced, dogged person, with much of her mother’s heavy, just kindness. The efforts she had made to keep up to Theo in the days of Theo’s brilliance had given her a capacity for hard work which made her a success in her own line. She was contentedly un-

married, rather jolly and auntlike already with men, by the time she was twenty-six and Theodora a couple of years older; and by this time every one considered Avalene much the elder. Time made little mark on Theodora, who had tacitly become one of the younger sisters, to be run by Lena, as they were trained to call her now, for their own good. She was as much and as willingly under Lena's guidance as little Milly. More, indeed, for Milly was twenty and engaged, and her ring made her feel independent.

Theo had no such claim to respect. So she took pullings up with meekness, knowing herself to be absent-minded, and apt to "do things in a dream," except for her fierce mothering of Pussy, the youngest sister. Indeed, Theo's whole attitude to life had become meek. She still had a sort of independence which was self-respect, but beneath it, too palpable, was that pathetic eagerness to please which you so often see in gentle-natured, neglected women. Theo had learned before she was twenty that if she wanted people to like her she must pay by doing things for them—to buy a little gratitude. She scarcely expected even that from men. A man would meet her and talk to her for five minutes, on the strength of her long blue eyes and yellow hair

and Diana-figure; then he would discover that the something which makes women interesting simply was not there; and go as soon as he decently could. Women did the same in a more courteous way.

Theo looked a little hurt and wistful sometimes when some man or woman would show all too plainly that they thought her uninteresting; but she never said anything. That much of the old Elizabethan gallantry was left to her. She carried herself straightly and proudly still, though there was nothing left of the old lissom, unconscious challenge in her bearing. People would turn to look at her walking from the ferry to her office every morning. But they never looked twice. The something that holds the eye had gone. And that was in spite of the fact that she had changed so little as to be more like a statue of her former self than anything else.

It was to this unchangedness that she owed her recognition by Leila Graves. She was walking swiftly from the ferry as usual, intent on shopping, for it was a holiday for her, when somebody's motor pulled up sharply, and she heard a voice calling her. She turned, and saw an opulent rose of a woman, furred to the eyes, waving a white-gloved hand at her.

"Theo Woods! It *is* Theo!" said the lovely lady delightedly, and swept her impetuously into the seat beside her. Theo came, with the dazed docility of her older years, but it was a full minute before she had the clue. "Leila Graves—don't you know me, goosie! Oh, don't say I'm changed as much as *that!*"

Then Theo placed her; and remembered hearing, indifferently as she heard most things, that Leila had married a rich man whom she had met at her father's hotel, and lived in New York now.

Leila laughed; the same honest, gay laugh Theo remembered, and it turned her somehow into the girl she had known, in spite of the careful dressing of the black curls, and the film of powder over the rosy cheeks. Leila looked her age as Theo didn't. But she was ripe and alive, so alive that her dangerous skirting of overplumpness was a thing you liked. Theo vaguely felt the difference between them, and wished that Lena was there to tell her what to do. Nobody ever overawed Lena.

Meanwhile Leila talked straight ahead in the old way.

"I'm going to let everything I'd planned go to the winds. It was only a hen luncheon and a silly old tea anyway. It isn't every day you discover your

long-lost chum. Just think, Theo, it's fourteen years since you went away. And all this time I've wondered about you and where you were and what you were doing—and here you are!"

"It's very kind of you to give up your engagements for me," Theo answered lamely, feeling the stiff inadequateness of her words as she spoke. But Leila had never been a very sensitive or observant person. She went on talking to Theo, carried along by her own excitement. For a minute Theo's cheeks colored in the old way, and she felt a spark of the old self come back, in the echo of Leila's belief that it was there. Then it faded, and she was again the inarticulate Theo of today.

Whether Leila felt the difference in her or not, she went on pouring out chatter about such of their schoolmates as she had kept in sight. Wanda Bailey was a musical comedy star—that shy little thing with the eyelashes! Hetty Christie, after getting herself talked about in every way known to the scandal-loving Park, had married the boy next door to her, and was a leading soprano in the church choir. She had three children. Gypsy Donovan was a commercial traveler—of all things for a girl to be!—Naomi Ainslie wrote books, all by herself in a studio. Clarence Griggs was in the paper business,

and Anderson Gray had died of typhoid just as he got back from his honeymoon. The Ferrier boys were doing splendidly till the war started; Ethan had put himself through medical school and all. He was in the medical corps now, of course. Quincy had made heaps of money as a broker, but he was in Europe when the war broke out, and stayed there to enlist. (This was all before the war suddenly sat down flat and ended. Just a little while before.) She would get some of them up to see Theo. She never met any one of them without having them ask about Theo and wonder what she was doing.

Did Theo remember the time when she and Gypsy and Leila had written Clarence Griggs a note, and then made him wait outside her door three hours in the rain, for her to wave a handkerchief at him? And the time Anderson Gray was caught by the teacher kissing Leila's Geometry where she had touched it. . . .

Theo's eyes brightened as she listened. Those far-off childish triumphs were comforting to hear about, though she couldn't make them seem ever to have been her own. The audacious and all-conquering child who had led a half-dozen wild other children through a dozen wild adventures seemed to her somebody else—some young princess ancestor of

whom she might be dimly proud. No more. She tried desperately to be that girl through luncheon with Leila at a fashionable restaurant, after which they went up to Leila's lovely little apartment and sat by the wood-fire. She tried still as she was motored down to the ferry, picking up Leila's husband, whose name was Billy Minton, by the way. And she tried to make herself think she had succeeded.

She reported it all to her family, of course, at the supper table. So little happened to any of them that everything had to be recounted at length, and was usually discussed for a week afterwards. This counted as a great adventure.

"You make a fuss over that Leila Graves, Theo," her father advised, wagging his sandy-gray head wisely. He had grown a little foolish as he became older, and less conscious of his own mental processes. He didn't feel the necessity of hiding his motives from himself so carefully. "You don't know what you may get out of it, if she's as rich as all that."

Theo colored up.

"I don't want to get anything out of it," she answered. "She was lovely to me."

"Then it's only decent for you to be nice to her.

I remember how she used to tag round after you. She'd probably be as crazy over you as ever, give her the chance," said Avalene more gracefully than her father, but to the same general effect.

"Lots of rich people in New York don't have any friends," chimed in young Milly wisely. "I've read stories about it. Like as not she was awful glad to see a face she knew."

Theo, remembering Leila's careless mention of a tea and a luncheon dropped for old sake's sake, was not so sure. But the family, to whom less happened than even in old years, went on discussing the encounter in all its phases, and deciding individually what Theo should proceed to do in order to keep Leila's friendship, till Theodora almost wished she hadn't dutifully reported her day.

Meanwhile warm-hearted Leila was telling her Billy all about it, and trying to discover why Theo had left her so unmoved.

"I tell you, Billy, she was wonderful!" she insisted plaintively. "I think I must have turned into a horrid heartless person, or grown awfully old, not to have any feelings about her."

Her husband shook his practical, close-clipped head.

"Never saw a stupider girl. Didn't even walk

right— jerked. Good looking enough if you like that rangy kind, but a fearful bore."

Leila sprang to the defence of her old idol.

" Why, whenever I run across anybody from the Park the first thing they say, nearly, is, ' Have you heard anything of Theo? I suppose she's made a brilliant match, or had some sort of a wonderful career.' "

He shook his head again, and reached for the matches—they were finishing dinner.

" You can't convince me. You were a little girl with a schoolgirl crush on her. She was never really anything like that."

" I could bring a dozen people to prove it," said Leila spiritedly. " I know she isn't even interesting now. But she's turned into something else. She *was* wonderful."

" You're dreaming, honey. There isn't a sane human being in the world who would back you up. It's just your own nice way of looking at things."

" Is it a bet? " demanded Leila unexpectedly.

He nodded calmly.

" The furs you want against—well, I'd have to pay for both sides. The furs against your letting me have my way the next time you want yours! "

" Fair enough," said Leila, as she rose and walked

defiantly to the telephone. "I'll get Naomi to start on. And she can help me get someone else in a hurry, because she's a celebrity, and Park people hunt her up because they knew her then."

Naomi, the celebrity, answered with an awed thrill in her ordinarily unimpassioned voice.

"Theo Woods? Of course I'd come—miles! Who shall I try for? Clarence Griggs? But there'd have to be his wife."

Mrs. Griggs had been married for money, and showed it too much. One did not invite her unless expediency impelled.

"Do you think you could get your cousin Ethan?" suggested Leila. "He hasn't gone over yet, has he?"

"Not yet, I think. Aunt Lucina says they keep him pretty busy, but I'll try for him at Upton. He knew Theo pretty well, didn't he?"

"M'hm. He had a wild case on her."

"Did he?" said his cousin indifferently. "I didn't know. Well, then, I'll get Ethan if I can, Clarence Griggs if I can't. I'm afraid it will have to be Saturday night. They work him very hard."

"Good!" said Leila, and hung up the telephone with triumph in her eye.

Theo was invited, and came duly on Saturday

evening. She was not specially moved by the prospect of seeing Ethan. The circumstances of the old hurt, so far as her conscious mind went, were entirely buried. When Avalene recalled that Ethan had been crazy over Theo, the girl's only feeling was the old dread of not measuring up to her princess-self of the old time. She was much more excited at the prospect of meeting Naomi, whom she had never known well, but whose books she had seen of late. She had never met any one who wrote before. Her father was more excited still.

"I don't see why you can't drop bookkeeping and sit down and write a novel. You were a lot smarter than Naomi Ainslie," he insisted about once a day till the moment when she went, and Theo answered him patiently each time, "All right, papa, I'll try."

Her tone dragged a little the last time she said it, for she was tired from being up the night before, letting down and taking in Avalene's black dinner gown to fit her. It was a wispy thing, but it looked well on Theo's tall slenderness. Considered in the abstract, she was beautiful as she came out from Leila's bedroom, having left there her raincoat, and walked nervously into the little room where the others waited. But the feeling of pleasure that

beauty must give to be recognized as such was so lacking that they scarcely thought her pretty at all.

For her own impressions, she admired at first sight, most, a negligible Celtic poet whom Naomi had brought along so that there should be an even number of men and women. He had drifting black hair and was in evening dress, and possessed a supercilious air. All these taken together awed Theo for quite a little while—until she discovered that the others were merely amused by him, indeed.

Naomi, little changed from the smooth-haired, nervous-featured child of old except for eyeglasses and a capacity for laughter, and Ethan, big and immobile in his khaki, did not frighten her as much as she had expected. They seemed easy and natural, and just like folks.

Leila's husband looked after her throughout dinner, telling her little jokes with that excellent semblance of frank enjoyment which is a part of the American business man's equipment. She enjoyed the dinner and the jokes as a child enjoys; the light and the good food and the laughter, and the fictitious feeling of being *in* things for the moment, which the whole party gave her.

As the meal went on she noticed Ethan a little more; perhaps because of some glimmering that he

was secretly watching her. She looked at him with a little curiosity.

He was tall and broad, as he had promised to be, and rather impressive. He had acquired poise, conversation, and a deliberate, kindly manner which was very likable. Altogether an ordinary, courteous gentleman, with the mark of professionalism already on him; not strikingly different from others of his type, except for the slight, winning stammer which he had never lost, and for his remarkable eyes. They were still, when he was off guard, the burning eyes of the New England mystic—almost fanatic—of one who would go to any length for conscience' sake. Theo saw nothing much of all this. She had never thought about people a great deal.

Through the dinner and the rest of the evening Theo, unconscious, of course, that she was under any special scrutiny, behaved very nicely. She was quiet, that was all; a little shy of the poet, and formal with the others.

She had to go early, because her father was still severe if she stayed out late, rarely as her outings happened. The other daughters ignored his naggings by now, but Theo was still affected by them. So Naomi dispatched her well-trained poet to the

ferry with Theo, as she and Leila had planned beforehand. This left the clear field that Leila wanted for discussion.

Leila returned from hospitably following them to the door, and sank down again with an unconscious sigh of relaxation. The others, too, leaned back, in freer attitudes. Relief was in the air.

“Billy, the irrepressible, voiced it.

“Gee! I’m going to put on more wood to take the chill out of the air!”

Naomi spoke next, musingly.

“Now I understand why people used to believe in the existence of changelings!”

Ethan said nothing at all. Only his deep eyes looked straight at Leila, with a puzzled question in them.

“And that’s your childhood charmer!” Billy went on, between puffs of his pipe. “Ferrier—Naomi—there’s a bet on, as you know. Now, be fair. Can either of you sit there and tell me honestly that the wooden image we’ve just been pleased to part with ever made anybody have any emotion but pleasure at seeing the last of her?”

Ethan had been leaning forward, chin on hand, staring at the rug. He spoke without moving or looking at any one, in a dull, uninflected voice.

“When Theodora came into a room it was as if a light went on. . . . When she spoke you remembered everything she said until you saw her again. . . . She was like a princess, and we all worshipped her. I am very sorry to have seen her again.”

He ceased speaking, remaining immovable, staring at the rug still. When he was done there was a little uneasy pause.

Billy threw off the spell first. He laughed a little.

“Lord! I can’t believe it!”

Naomi reinforced her cousin. Her small pale face was rather moved.

“Oh, yes, Billy, it’s quite true. Something curious seems to have happened to her. When she was between fifteen and sixteen she was the most brilliant girl in the place, and the most charming. She was a leader, and adored.”

Billy’s great boyish laugh boomed out again.

“You win, Leila! But I think you stuffed the ballot box——”

He was interrupted by Ethan, rising decisively.

“If you people don’t mind, I’ll go. Camp makes you used to early hours. I’ll drop you at your place, Naomi, if you hurry and get your things on.”

He spoke almost brusquely, but Naomi, watching him under her eyelashes, thought he eyed her with a furtive appeal. She rose and went obediently with him.

“There’s time to walk, if you don’t mind,” he said, drawing a long breath of evident relief when they were outside.

“I’d like to,” she said gently.

He wanted to talk; she was sure of that now. She let him hurry her along silently for a couple of blocks. She wondered what was coming. But she was not braced for the note of horror in his voice when he did speak.

“Naomi! It was a profanation—*that* being our Theodora!”

She had wondered if he was going to be in love with Theo again. Apparently not. The note in his voice was nearly one of hate. She tried to answer him lightly.

“It isn’t our Theodora. *She* is in a green hill somewhere, having the old wild good time till the day of Judgment. This is a changeling the Good People have left to mock us.”

“*Don’t!*” he said passionately. “I can’t bear it. . . . Don’t let’s talk of it at all. I wish I could forget seeing *That*.”

"But, Ethan dear!" she began wonderingly. He burst out again passionately.

"I worshipped the ground she walked on!" he said. "It was never like a boy's love. It was all the love any man ever has for any woman. I've never cared for any one since. I've always told myself with certainty that I'd find her again. I believed it like gospel. No matter how old we were —no matter how long it was—I'd find her and it would be all right. . . . And now this—this pitiful *Thing* with its jerks and its meeknesses and its anxiousness to please and its stupidity. . . . And the damned creature daring to wear the mask of my Theo!"

"I wonder," said Naomi inadequately, "I wonder what did it."

"For heaven's sake, don't try to find out!" said her cousin savagely. "And if you have the slightest consideration for me, Naomi, never let me see that creature again."

He did not ask her to keep his confidence. He knew she would. Somehow people never minded Naomi's knowing intimate things about them, even her relatives. She seemed so a spectator at life that it scarcely mattered. So they said no more about it. Naomi spent the rest of the way home quietly

bringing Ethan back to his usual unemotional, kindly self, and succeeded perfectly well.

But Naomi herself wondered a great deal about Theo. It did not seem such a happen-so to her as to the others; it was her creed that when something happened it was because something else—even though the something else were very small and very remote—had made it. And affairs of the mind and soul interested her. She wanted the answer to Theo; she was nearly sure that there must be one. So she asked the girl to have dinner with her at the little studio apartment a week later.

Theo by herself was not so nervous or so shy as Theo at a party. She even tried to be entertaining, which gave Naomi a ghastly feeling as if she were seeing a Barrie play very badly done by daylight. She told Naomi a number of stories about her sisters' performances, wonderful, clearly, in her eyes; she even essayed a funny anecdote Avalene had brought home, ruining it completely in the telling.

Naomi watched pitifully the limping mind which had been so swift and effortless, with its submissiveness where there had been bright defiance, and its struggles where there had been delight in achievement. And she watched herself, and the feeling

that Theo produced in her. It was distaste; a distaste and weariness that was the complement of the eagerness she had once felt to be with her. So she watched her friend more undisguisedly than she thought, and the girl, none too deft at best, moved uneasily, dropped a spoon on the floor, and then smiled in nervous apology.

"I'm always doing that," she said. "Avalene says I'm the clumsiest thing she ever saw."

"Did you ever have a bad nervous breakdown?" Naomi asked with quick irrelevancy.

"Why, how queer you could tell, or did you hear about it? Yes, but not for ever so many years. I'd almost forgotten about it. I studied too hard my last year in High, and I had to go off to Gramma Coburn's for two months till I was all right again. Avalene——"

Naomi deflected the inevitable reference to Avalene, Pussy, Milly, or Pussy's or Milly's beaux, which she knew was coming, and set Theo's rambling mind again on the track of the nervous breakdown. It was hard at first. Something under the surface automatically jerked her away from the topic of herself when she had gone a certain distance, and took her to Milly, or her great pride, Avalene, again. But Naomi persisted, and at last

Theo, under the spell of that almost forgotten thing, an interested auditor, told about it; the affair with young Ethan, which she seemed to feel herself bound to belittle; and presently even her father's brutality over it.

It was not until almost the end of the story that Naomi got a clue from an unmeant word.

Theo had believed herself to be a shameless girl. Her father had managed to stab into the very depths of her consciousness the certainty that her gay ways, and her harmless flirtations with boys made her disgraced and wicked. No matter how she might push it away from her own surface knowledge, fundamentally it was there.

And her shamed underself, agonized for the sense of rightness at any cost, would hold her, no matter how she suffered, from any word or look or vibration which could or would attract man, woman, or child.

She tried to show this to Theodora as she divined it, but she found that she was speaking an unknown language.

“We were all just kids,” Theo would repeat with her little awkward laugh. “It was all of it awfully silly—it didn’t have anything to do with my nerves. Why, I’d forgotten about it! Mother said I must

put it all out of my mind, and I did. I guess I was pretty fresh when I lived in the Park."

So Naomi only said, "Have some more candied fruit, won't you, Theo? Did you say it was Milly who made such good fudge, or Avalene?"

Theo responded gratefully, eating the sweets with a child's pleasure. They must have meager fare at the Woods' house, Naomi meditated. And she had the key to the enigma, which was a thing she always liked. It seemed a pity, though, a cruel pity. But then, reasoned Naomi, most things were. She was very nice to Theo the next few weeks, especially nice; something in the spirit in which you cover graves with flowers.

Therefore Ethan, with a message from his mother, ran into Theo at Naomi's one afternoon. He entered as she left. Naomi saw his darkened face, and apologized.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I wouldn't have had her, of course, if I'd expected you. But really it seemed to me so horribly tragic——"

She pulled herself up, and he did not ask her what she meant, at least not then. He prowled around the studio for a little while, lifting things and putting them down.

Finally he came to anchor before the chair where

she sat watching him. "You might as well talk to me about it," he said doggedly. "What is there that's tragic about that—girl?"

Naomi was interested in her own deductions. She forgot herself entirely in her interest in them, as she poured them out to Ethan. His mind was always a pleasure to her; they were alike in a habit of ruthless straight thinking, and liked to think together. And Ethan's distaste for Theodora blinded her to any bearing his own part in the case might have on his attitude to the story.

She had been knitting as she talked, with her eyes down on her work. She looked up at him at the end, triumphant over what she had deduced; and, seeing his face, gasped into silence. It was white and tense, and there was horror in it—the horror of something dreadful faced ahead.

"What is it, dear? Oh, what is it?" she asked in terror.

"Then—then it was I—who *killed* her!" he said jerkily, still with that look of faced horror.

"No, no!" cried out Naomi.

"I killed her," he repeated.

Naomi had been so carried away by her professional interest in the thing that its connection with Ethan had slipped from her entirely. In her mind

all the blame of Theodora's shaming was at the door of her father. Ethan had only done what most boys would do,—obeyed when a man of his own father's age ordered him. But she saw now how it had flung itself at Ethan. And it was too nearly likely to be true to be denied easily. There had been doubtless a half-dozen factors in the quenching of that light which had burned in Theodora. But the belief that her boy-lover had despised and deserted her—Naomi had no certainty that it hadn't been the final wrecking. Still, Naomi fought it, denying as best she might against her own belief.

"Ethan dear, don't feel so exaggeratedly about it. Put it out of your mind—there's nothing to be done about it, now. Most people have a shipwreck or so before they die; only Theo's happened to be a bit more spectacular than the common run."

"I—I wrote her," was all he said, in a vague way.

"Of course you did!" affirmed Naomi. "It was the silly old father who held up your letters. Theo said so. At least she said he told her so a few years ago. She didn't seem to bear him any malice. Ethan, Ethan, don't look that way! I tell you there's nothing to be done."

"There is something to be done," he turned on

her almost angrily. Then, in little broken phrases as he walked up and down, "I ran away . . . I left her to it . . . I took away her only chance of not being smashed. Just like a clock—my God, just like a clock with its works all scrapped! I owe it to her to marry her. Yes—just as if I'd ruined her. . . . Ruined her! Heavens, what would that have been beside the thing I did do! . . . That soulless, jerking wreck—I made it!"

Naomi, almost frantic over him, snatched at the phrase he had flung out.

"Marry her! Oh, Ethan dear, don't! You wouldn't straighten out her life, and you'd ruin yours. You can't bear her. You'd be unhappy—"

She stopped, conscious of the inadequacy of that or any other argument, to this man, with his streak of mysticism, fanaticism, mad conscientiousness. Call it what you would, she knew it, and what it would make him do. His happiness had ceased to concern him. Finally she tried for a little comfort for her own feelings. Perhaps he cared for Theo still. She had hoped that Ethan would marry a girl he loved, and perhaps this way, after all—

"But you do care for her a little still?" she ventured. "It's come back a little?"

He shook his head.

“No. . . . But in one way it will be all right. In three weeks we’ll be going over. I’m nearly sure. Four at the outside. I’ll marry her in a day or so. I can stand that much of it. And then she’ll have insurance, and there may be a child. She’d like a child, and it might straighten her out. . . . Thank God I hadn’t learned to care for anybody else!”

Yes, there was still that to be thankful for.

There was no pretense between them that Theo might refuse to marry Ethan. The girl’s pitiful mortification over her unattractiveness showed in spite of her gallant efforts to hide it. Her helpless, confused gratitude for the commonest attentions was naked to the world. And she had been Princess Theo!

Ethan tried Naomi still further.

“You’ll have to get her here—let me see—I can’t get away again till Friday afternoon. Have her here, and I’ll speak to her. She’s like a child. She’ll think it natural enough that I never forgot her, once I tell her so.”

Naomi bowed her head. She had pulled the thing down on Ethan herself. If she did not do as he wished he would find another way, and this was easiest.

"Very well," she said. And then, impulsively, "Oh, I wish there were miracles!"

"There aren't," said Ethan succinctly. "About four, then."

Theo fidgeted a little at finding herself alone with a man for an hour to come. Naomi had made her promise to wait there till she came back, and left her, crossing Ethan as she went out.

"Must you?" she implored hopelessly as she went out.

He nodded, patted her arm in a brotherly fashion, and went in, steadily smiling.

He went at it in a sufficiently courteous fashion, though a girl more used to lovers than Theo might have felt that something was missing. He had never forgotten her, he told her. He had never cared for any one else. He had always loved and respected the memory of her. . . .

She heard him through, fidgeting more than ever as he went on his slow, forced way. She laughed her little awkward laugh, and he hated her for it as he completed the voicing of his reparation. When he was done he sat silently a moment, bracing for what more he must do. Presently he looked up at her, sitting across from him.

She had stopped her little restless movements. She was rigid, and her eyes stared. She looked like a sleepwalker. He watched her, arrested. Presently from the base of her white, masklike face there began a flush which spread up to the roots of her yellow hair, and faded suddenly, leaving her white again. Unmoving, she spoke.

“Like—a star,” she said in a voice that was like a sleepwalker’s too.

He did not know what she meant at first. Then he remembered. He had said that, the afternoon before her father broke in on them, long ago. He had not thought she would have remembered.

“Yes,” he said, “like a star. You were like a star to me. I always remembered you so. I worshipped you.”

“Always? You—you never thought I was a wicked girl?”

For the first time he felt a thrill of pity for her. It was almost as if he was giving a message to be carried to that Theo he remembered.

“Never—never, Theo! I went off because your father sent me; because I was a young coward. I never even heard the things he said to you. I tried to see you afterwards, and write, but he wouldn’t

give me a chance. I worshipped you, as we all did. Only I cared more."

She made no answer. Her head drooped. He could not see her face; and for a moment the illusion came to him of that old Theo. There might be other moments of that illusion, he thought, to make the weeks of their marriage bearable. He looked no further than that, because he never intended to come back from the war.

While that blessed illusion was still with him he took courage to go on to the next thing he must do. He knew that he must touch her, kiss her—do something to show her that the lie he was acting was not a lie. He slipped down on one knee by her, putting his arms around her and drawing her face down to his, as they had been that last night when they were children. He repeated the words he had said, desperately, and kissed her.

"You were like a star to me," he repeated.

Her lips felt cold under his, and she was rigid for a moment more. Suddenly her arms, which had been lax, closed strongly around him, and she responded to his kiss. He felt her begin to sob helplessly.

"Ethan—Ethan——" he heard her say brokenly,

and yet with a depth in her voice that he had forgotten. "So many years——"

His heart leaped suddenly. He pushed her head back, unbelieving, so that he could look into her eyes. And at what he saw he drew her close again.

Naomi re-entered at the end of two hours, heartsick still. She stood unseen for a moment in the dusk of her doorway.

"The war is going to end, they say, in a little while now," she spoke across the room.

"Thank God!" said Ethan, lifting a face of joyful adoration from bending above the girl in his arms.

And as Naomi still stood, glad yet unbelieving, Theo came swiftly across to her with her old sweeping, swift step. Her face smiled vividly at Naomi, and her hands were outstretched.

"Thank God!" said Naomi. "Oh, thank God, Ethan! Miracles *do* happen sometimes!"

ROSABEL PARADISE

WE were not a gentle, fussy, little old-lady town any more. We had a charter, and we were a raw, young, ill-bred citylet which wanted to forget leading strings as violently as a deacon's son in the city for the first time. We had thrown off our tutors and governors, forty-five stingy, businesslike, but thoroughly good, old gentlemen, and we were being as blunderingly devilish, corporately and individually, as we knew how. We had been a camp-meeting association. We were now a full-fledged summer resort. Our ex-rulers sighed over their plump balances, and quoted hymns about every prospect pleasing and only man being vile.

This was really not a bad description of the Park from one point of view.

Whatever point of view yours might be, if you lived in the Park all the year round there was one thing you were sure to say with conviction, sooner or later:

“ This is no place to bring up a child.”

The feverish, tawdrily gay summer, when you couldn't do a thing with the children, alternated

with the emptily idle winter, when there wasn't a thing for the children to do. If our people had any money they sent us to boarding-school. If they hadn't, or didn't worry, we spent fourteen hours a day and all available change on the boardwalk in summer, and made precocious love to each other there in winter after school.

Rosabel Paradise was not of the little flock who were exiled to boarding-school or convent. Her mother hadn't the money and would never have thought of it, anyway.

Her name sounds as if it had been her own hasty manufacture, but it was hers legally. Some of our elders remembered dimly a Bill Paradise who had been her father and a carpenter, and who had fallen off a ladder and broken his neck back in the dark ages. Rosabel's first name was probably out of a book of Miss Libbey's. Her mother read them a great deal. She was a thin, voluble woman, with occasional teeth and an aimless intensity of manner. She was a dressmaker of the less skillful kind; the sort you engaged at a pinch when your pet many-dollars-a-day genius was promised haughtily far ahead, and Margie's pink frock had to be done by next Tuesday night.

Rosabel herself was a scrawny, sallow child of

fifteen, with big, heavy-lashed black eyes and a furtive manner. She was little for her age, and she dressed always in heavily trimmed blue and magenta cashmeres that her mother made for her. There was a pathetic elaboration about the colored cashmeres and about the wide ribbons on the child's lank, black hair. You could see that her mother petted her in a fierce, making-up sort of way, as women pet children who are deformed—though Rosabel was not deformed in the least. She might have been even pretty if she had been graceful and clear-skinned and had had a different expression. If Rosabel had been deformed the chances are she would have been happier. It was not that. Two years ago Things had happened.

It's easy to say who are to blame for Things—mothers and self-will and such—but putting blame where it accurately belongs is much harder than pigs-in-clover. And when an ignorant, excitable woman has to earn her living by being a dressmaker-by-the-day she cannot be as thorough in her child-training as if she had had a governess, or could keep her child in the convent where they sent little Leila Graves and Wanda Bailey.

And then it might not have made so much dif-

ference if Rosabel *had* had that desirable, if somewhat annoying, thing our elders called "good home training." Because at thirteen Rosabel acquired a bosom friend, and from about ten to seventeen a bosom friend has more power over you than all the law and the prophets.

Nellie—this special one—was the kind to use power to the limit. She was two years older than Rosabel, and very clever. She was not afraid of any one, not even grown people or policemen. She was softly plump and blonde and wide-smiling, and she painted her cheeks pink and darkened her eyelashes. She was very wise in all the things little girls wonder about. Rosabel often marveled how she came to know so much. But Nellies are born knowing. They are the material of which are made certain types of vaudeville players and ladies who marry aged millionaires slightly before they die. So when Nellie got a position with the man who had the concession for the Mystic Turkish Grotto, she had no trouble getting Rosabel one as well. Rosabel's mother was quite willing. It would not only mean money, but, as she said, it would keep the kids off the boardwalk.

It did, of course—that is, it kept Rosabel, which was all her mother cared about. Nellie's hours were

from ten to three. Rosabel Paradise had the afternoon-evening shift. They sat behind a little wicket in their best dresses and took tickets. The man who ran the Mystic Turkish Grotto stayed mostly in a little room opening off the one behind the wicket, so he could keep tabs on the audience and also on the honesty of the girls. Their pay was sure and high, as pay for temporary positions always is. Altogether, as Nellie boasted to her "pick-ups," it was a soft snap.

Nothing happened to Nellie. The reputations of Nellies are permanently dingy at the edges, but somehow they never seem to get black all over. When fall came and the Park closed all at once like a stage city, Nellie drifted off somewhere else, out of Rosabel Paradise's life. So did the man who had run the Turkish Grotto. That is, if you want to call him a man. He was really a brute beast: more especially because he was over fifty, married, and, they said, had grown-up daughters.

Poor women cannot take their daughters off on six months' trips to vague somewhere for their health when Things happen. Rosabel Paradise stayed at home in the little four-room red-plush flat over the Johnson dairy. And the women in the flat below heard Rosabel's mother screaming at her, and

Rosabel crying, crying, crying as only a heartbroken child can cry. And when Rosabel fell quickly ill they knew it and said things about her mother; and when Rosabel got better, white and little and broken-spirited, they said things about her. And they asked the doctor leading questions, so that he was rude to them, and they talked more.

After that none of the girls would speak to Rosabel. Oh, we were very wise at thirteen and fourteen, we of the Park!

Rosabel seemed very lonely—not that you could stop for that. She used to sit and play jacks on her doorstep, and cringe when people passed. And she used to steal up and down the boardwalk alone, in her brilliant, cheaply-elaborate dresses, listening to the band and hungrily watching other people having good times with each other. No one ever spoke to her, except the ministers and one or two of the middle-aged women in her mother's insurance society. Not even the boys bothered her; she was too forlorn and dingy a little figure for their notice. She was too young to make friends with a grown-up bad element, even if she had wanted to. And apparently she did not want to. She helped her mother around the house and kept on playing jacks on the

doorstep. The other girls of her age graduated to postage-stamp plates and cigar-band cushions, but it's difficult to follow the fashions if you are an outcast. There's no one to go by.

Rosabel Paradise must have been just around fifteen the April Miss James got up the fan-drill for the Second Lutheran Church. It was a curly, complicated drill, not worth half the practice it took, but drills were sweeping the country that year. This was to be the *pièce de résistance* of an entertainment with a red church carpet as its goal. Miss James was more or less of an outlander; a cousin of the Jameses across the lake in Allenwood. There were old houses there, and people who lived something like the ones in the Duchess novels. They had servants instead of a "girl," and their children couldn't do as they pleased. Little Catherine James even had a governess. We envied her a little, but we were sorry for her, too.

Miss James drilled earnestly, but by the fourth rehearsal her soul was weary within her. Twenty-four girls of assorted sizes and romantic names, with not a scrap of enthusiasm among the twenty-four, are very hard on a trainer. We of the Park were *blasé* with a boardwalk sophistication which could give Miss James points, for she was not much

over twenty herself and a newcomer in town. The first wild, careless rapture had gone from the girls' hearts, and by this time they were dropping unashamedly out, or sending impudent messages about not needing so many rehearsals.

So when Rosabel Paradise, dingy and furtive as ever, with a wad of soiled embroidery crushed in her hand, slid into a seat at the bottom of the Wesley Avenue Pavilion where the girls rehearsed, Miss James eyed her with interest as a possible recruit. The number that day was uneven, and they could not finish properly without another girl. At the first pause Miss James skimmed down to the door with the darting, swallowlike movements that all teachers of gymnastics acquire.

"What's your name, dear?" she asked breathlessly, alighting at Rosabel's side. "Wouldn't you like to come into the drill? Come, try it once, anyway, won't you?"

Rosabel Paradise flushed scarlet. There must have been a great deal of dumb, lonely horror included in all the months since *Things* had happened, but you have to be to a certain degree grown-up, or very clever, to have horror make you wiser and older. Rosabel was only a little girl still; all the more childish, perhaps, for *Things* having happened

and shut her up in an invisible, shameful prison two years before. It must have seemed very wonderful to her, the chance of being in something once more, after watching everything go mockingly by her for so long.

"My name's Rosabel Paradise," she said, bringing it out with a jerk of effort. She looked down at her grimy embroidery in the old hangdog way, and wriggled her shoulders. "I'd—like to join very much," she finished, flushing darker and tugging at the embroidery.

Such willingness as this was not the custom of the country. Miss James beamed with pleasure and carried Rosabel off to the head of the room.

"This is Rosabel Paradise, girls," she announced. "She'll fill in Thelma Petty's place."

Nobody answered, but neither Miss James nor Rosabel noticed it, they were so busy getting Rosabel placed. She was handed over to Catherine, Miss James's little cousin, because Catherine had attended all four rehearsals and could best manage a newcomer.

Catherine did not live in the Park, so she did not know all we did about the evils of this wicked world. She was a gentle little thing with fair, straight hair and a sweet, serious little face; rather an Alice-in-

Wonderland grown to be fourteen or so. She had been brought up, said our elders with the incomprehensible approval of elders, to *be* a little girl. This seemed to us an advantage taken of Catherine by her people for their own purposes. It certainly wasn't useful to Catherine. We pitied her tentatively while we held her in awe for her pretty manners, and did not dare come so very near. But Catherine, hand-in-hand with Rosabel Paradise! The girls eyed the pair of them silently, whispered a little, and went on drilling. You could not make a row in the middle of things, and as long as you were there, you might as well practise. It was the best day's work the girls had put in, and Miss James told them so. There had been no giggling, no dashes to the door to see boys stroll by: nothing but dense silence and dogged marching.

At last the ranks broke. Rosabel went away quickly and silently, after her usual custom. Most of the other girls lingered. They broke into little knots and talked earnestly. Presently Miss James became aware that they were pushing each other, with "You go, Pearl!" "Naw, you go, Leila!" Shyness in the Park was as much a portent as enthusiasm, and Miss James awaited events with interest. There was a final whisper of: "You go,

Beryl!" and Beryl went. She walked up to Miss James and spoke.

"Miss James," she said, "we got something to tell you—something you oughta know."

"Well, Beryl?"

Beryl's hard, handsome little face hardened still more under the stress of the message.

"That girl, Rosabel Paradise, she ain't fit for us decent girls to go with," said Beryl.

Beryl seems always to have had a strong sense of virtue; she had procured divorces from two husbands by the time she was twenty-three. She was fourteen at the time of the Paradise affair.

"What do you mean?" asked Miss James, stiffening; and Beryl explained—explained with the hideous clarity and detail of country towns. You see, we had only had our charter such a very little while!

"An' if she stays in the rest of us will just hafta drop out," she wound up. "My mamma, she says: 'Beryl,' she says, 'you're too young to learn evil. You keep away from that there girl.'"

Catherine clutched her cousin's hand, half horrified, half thrilled, and her cousin, remembering her, cut the thing short.

"We'll see what the Ladies' Aid says," she tem-

porized. But she knew very well what the Ladies' Aid would say. It is all very well to stand up for the oppressed, but one oppressed all by herself won't make a drill any more than the one swallow we have heard about makes a summer. So the end of it was that a very gentle, kind note was sent to Rosabel; as kind, that is, as such a note can be. To be sure, that isn't saying very much. And Rosabel's mother came out and made a trying and unavailing row at the minister's house.

This was entirely the wrong place. She should have chosen the Ladies' Aid. She took a great deal of time which the minister could ill afford from his sermon, and went into hysterics and had to be sent home. But that was all.

All, at least, till the next Monday night.

It seems curious that this one incident should have had so much effect on Rosabel Paradise. There must have been others at least a little like it in those long eighteen months since Things had happened.

Perhaps she just couldn't stand anything more. There do come times like that, even to fifteen-year-olds. Or perhaps it was because she was only fifteen that she took it so hard. The world is so much larger when you are fifteen than later; so much blacker or more golden, more heavenly or inexorable

a place. Its colors haven't softened down. There are beautiful rose-and-gold promises only waiting till your skirt is a little longer before they are realized. Or there are great horrible blacknesses that never will lift—never, never, never! And especially if you are cowed and ignorant, and little for your age, the blackness and inevitableness lock tight around you, like one of those nightmares where you are walled into a little, little suffocating place, and never can get out, and know the nightmare is true.

You never can tell anything, after all, about the way people really work inside. The fact remains: on Monday night about eight o'clock, while her mother was out at a sociable of the Daughters of Rebekah, Rosabel took gas. She did it rather clumsily and unsuccessfully, but still with the most serious intentions. She had evidently bathed and dressed, and tidied the bedroom carefully before she turned the gas on. It was not her fault that her mother got back before she was quite dead. The time she had taken cleaning up was what delayed her so that they managed to save her.

They made a terrific fuss, running in and out, bringing her to, and there was a whole column in the "Ocean Star" the next day. "Playmates Scorn Her: Child Attempts Life," it was headed.

It was very pathetic about the pink note with the embossed forget-me-nots in its corner, on which Rosabel had written her brief, ill-spelled reason for wanting to die. The "Ocean Star" also gave her age as twelve instead of fifteen, and did not explain accurately why the "playmates" had ignored Rosabel. It gave a general impression that it was a paper-doll or hoop-and-marbles quarrel.

The little red-plush parlor of the flat, and Rosabel's own room, were filled with flowers and wreaths and jelly and other appropriate things which the drill girls sent Rosabel while she was recovering. They were almost as sorry for her as they were thrilled by the melodrama of the affair. Rosabel lay happily getting better among the wired bouquets, playing with the tin-foil from their stems. She would not disturb the flowers to hold any of them. She did not say much—Rosabel never did seem able to say much, which makes her story harder to tell. But once she clutched the doctor's wrist as he bent cheerily over her, and asked in a passionate whisper: "Will the girls go with me when I get well, doctor?"

"Of course, of course, little girl," he answered confidently—doctors learn to say things confidently. He lifted her up on her pillows a little more.

"Would—would *Martha* ever come to see me?"

The doctor patted her hand compassionately, and in his pity had almost promised to bring his *Martha* down to see poor little wrecked Rosabel, big-eyed and desperate and helpless among her pillows. Then he remembered quickly, as fathers will, that pretty, dainty *Martha* was hard enough to keep away from the boardwalk as things were: that she was coaxing to be allowed to stay out after ten o'clock: that there had been a little box found by her mother, labeled "*Rouge Dorin*," tucked into the back of a drawer. It was only a phase, as it happened. *Martha* grew up as well-bred and straightforward as she was pretty, and married an out-of-town man, like all the better-class Park girls. Still—fathers are fathers. The doctor patted Rosabel's hand again and made a vague, kindly reply that promised nothing.

But Rosabel was rapturously counting the number of bouquets on washstand and bureau and sills again and scarcely heard. They may have been a comfort to her mother afterwards, those four or five days when Rosabel lay getting over the effects of the gas and smiling and counting her flowers.

Because in a little while she was able to be up and put on her magenta cashmere, and steal up and

down the boardwalk in the old way. It may have been the second day she was about that she met Beryl, surrounded by her followers. There was a clan of them, about eight, who hunted together. Rosabel halted, half-confident, half-frightened, nervously smiling.

"H'llo, Beryl," she said, almost inaudibly. But Beryl—

"Well, I couldn't speak to the kid just 'cause she tried to c'mit suicide," she defended herself to her followers and perhaps her conscience. And the followers chorused, though a shade doubtfully: "Naw, 'course you couldn't!"

Rosabel did not move for a minute after Beryl and her following had passed on, head in air. She stood still, a shaking, awkward little figure, till they were gone by. Then they heard the loud patter of her feet, suddenly, and heard her crying aloud, as she ran across the boardwalk and fled underneath it. You could hide and cry under the boardwalk as long as you liked in those days. It's been done over since, and you can't get under now. But then there was plenty of room for Rosabel to cry in.

The Park was a prohibition place, which means that all the drugstore keepers had to be regular physicians, so that they could give you prescriptions

for anything else you asked for, and they did. There was a great deal of competition. So it was quite simple for Rosabel to get all the laudanum she wanted, crawl back under the boardwalk, and take it unmolested.

This time she succeeded.

They found her two days later, coiled up like one of our hurt animals. Our cats and dogs always went there to die, poor beasts! and there were other reasons why men searched under the boardwalk often. They had to guess at why she did it, for there was no note this time. I suppose Rosabel thought, rightly, that one explanation was enough.

There were no paroxysms of repentance on our part this time, either, nor any flowers. We had done that once, and it's difficult to warm over emotions. People said that—really—it sounded hard, but the poor child had done almost the only thing she could do, if it wasn't for losing her immortal soul. Of course, if you think of our attitude to the child while she was still slinking around with the soul inside her, able to be saved, there is a great deal to be said for people's viewpoint. But for the first time in some years nobody's viewpoint worried Rosabel Paradise.

DON ANDREWS' GIRL

WHEN Don Andrews was little his playmates adored him. Girls and boys alike, we would do anything on earth he wanted us to do. Only the boys adored close by, the girls from afar. When he grew older we continued to adore. Don was of the stuff of one's imagined heroes. He was like a knight of old, strong and simple and chivalrously single-minded. That may have been the trouble. Most of us are so annoyingly complex nowadays, even the women. In the days of those knights Don was like, women were content to be prizes—something given away at the end of a contest, like a cup. Nowadays they insist on being individuals, and it throws things out horribly.

But to come back to Don: he was tall and grave and gentle and strong, with a vivid smile that lighted things. He was perfect physically, too, and the strongest boy in the Park, with that unusual muscular development which looks like mere grace. You would say, to look at him from a trainer's viewpoint, that he was well-built enough, lithe and handsome certainly, very fine as far as an illustrator's

ideas went, but nothing above the average. Then you saw him wrestle or row or swim or box, and you realized that it was the perfection of strength concealing strength.

The queer thing was, nobody was ever jealous of the boy. You might feel sore for a minute when he easily outclassed you at the thing you did best. But when he spoke to you afterward, gently and a bit apologetically, in that sweet, deep, cheering-up voice of his, you forgot all about your soreness. Then he smiled at you and you loved him.

There isn't any way to describe that smile of Don Andrews. But it loved you and trusted you and admired you and braced you up all in one flash of light, and you went off feeling as if somebody had given you a valuable present you'd been wanting a long time.

He was straight, too, Don; the cleanest, straightest fellow we knew. He kept in training all the time, not because he had to, especially, but because he preferred it. Take him all around, he was one of the men you do come across once or twice in life, but in whom nobody believes when you try to tell about them afterward. They sound too good to be true or comfortable. But Don was real. There was never anybody like Don Andrews!

Naturally, the strongest fellow in town has to be a bully, or a Lord Protector; but Don carried his magnanimity, it seemed to us all sometimes, to a point of fantastic chivalry. He was the small boys' guardian angel. Also if you wanted a thorough whipping that was as swiftly effortless on Don's part as it was swiftly over on yours you had only to pick a quarrel with some one your physical inferior. But for himself—for himself Don was maddening! Anything short of a straightout insolence he would meet only with gentleness, and that imperturbable charm of his. To be sure the aggressor, who was always, of course, a newcomer, was certain to succumb to Don's flashing smile and his steady, kind charm. Also Don's known strength made fights a rare necessity for him. But it seemed that his knowledge that he was bound to win made him feel that it wasn't fair for him to play the game at all. Oh, it is hard to make you see how everybody loved Don, how he drew love out of you as if there was some curious force in him that took it. I suppose it must have been that his own nature was love, that he had so much loving-kindness to give away that the merest acquaintance, perhaps, got as much as most of us have to give our own. And then his gallant Northman good looks, and the

swift, gentle strength and bravery of him! You had to love Don!

Of course the girls were wild about him, every last one. But, as I told you, they had to adore from afar. There was a very simple reason: Ida Fitzbrien. Even since Don had been twelve and Ida ten, they had "gone together," through our winter village life and our summer visitor-whirl. They were as true to each other, from the time they were little children, as if they had been married.

Ida was a silent, slim little thing, an ordinary type enough of the pretty American girl, with brown hair and blue eyes and not much color. She had a caressing, clinging sort of way when she did speak, but there was not about her anything especial that you could notice, except that she was Don Andrews' girl.

That was the way they pointed her out at the canoe races and the meets and the ball games. She sat silently in the reflection of Don's glory and let herself be envied by the rest of the girls. She never interfered with anything he wanted to do, or dragged on him at all, or showed the least jealousy of his friends. She was simply always there, unobtrusively in the background, quietly owning him; "Don Andrews' girl." To be sure, a girl has very

little chance to stray when she is marked out as belonging to the strongest boy in the place. But Ida seemed perfectly content to watch Don adoringly as he went his worshiped way. And he gave her in return the first and best love he had. And think what that must have been!

And still he went on his way, bound to his fantastically high standards by the responsibility of his unconquerableness, as a knight is bound by his vows. Quincy Ferrier, who would have been a bit of a bully in Don's position—he was a sort of second-in-command as it was, and Don's chum—expressed it crossly once. He had been raging at the Golden Rule fashion by which Don had won some especial brute to friendliness, instead of knocking him endwise as we had all yearned to see done.

“Humph,” he growled, “Don's mind's muscle-bound, that's all it is. He just physically *can't* be mean to people, any more than a coal-heaver can play tennis.” And Quincy softly invited Don's newest friend out into a soothing place behind Allen Lake, where there were pines and little birds and things, and reduced him to the state of the unspeakably licked. And we all felt better.

Well, Don grew up and went to work, and married Ida. They weren't rich, of course, but he had

a good position. His gift of handling men would have always made it easy for him to get anything in the way of work he wanted.

Ida and Don were twenty and twenty-two when they married. They were young, of course, but no younger than many of the other girls and boys who had dropped High School to settle down, house-holders and proud owners of plump babies. They built a nice little bungalow over on North Sixth Avenue, where the young married people settle, and started in to live happily ever after.

They did, as far as anybody ever knew, at first. They had a baby, a splendid little fellow, the copy of his father, as all first sons should be, and Don was wild over him. Ida was fond of the child, but Don was simply wrapped up in him. And Don went on winning cups all up and down the coast, and Ida went on watching him, as she had done for ten years. That is all there is to tell about them for the first year and a half.

Then by and by, no one knew exactly whence or how, rumors began to slide around that Ida wasn't staying at home as much as she should. But this was at the beginning of the summer when everybody and everything is standing on its head getting ready for the summer people, so nobody had time

to pay much attention. But later, when we had rented our houses and got our hotels in running order, and had time to meet breathlessly between summer people, we began to hear more about Ida. We didn't believe it, even here in the glad-to-believe-anything Park. Ida had been silly enough to peroxide her hair, and she was rouging too heavily; perhaps, we thought, that was why people said things. Because what would she do it for—married to *Don*!

Next season she began to be seen about in queer places with summer men of the cheaply-sporty sort, and, finally, nights when Don was known to be busy, she appeared alone on the boardwalk, "picking-up." After that, unfortunately, there were no two ways about believing things.

When conviction first was forced on us we gasped. Ida, of all girls! If it had been Dollie Valentine nobody would have been surprised—black-eyed, excitable little Dollie over at Radnor Beach, where all they could do was work summer men for good times. Or nobody would have been astonished if Leila Graves had gone under—Leila, whose happy-go-lucky father kept the fastest hotel in town. But Ida! Shy little caressing Ida Fitzbrien, who had never lifted her eyes from Don for

ten years, who had followed him about like an unobtrusive dog—Ida, who was married to Don, our Don, with a baby the very copy of him! Ida, with her hair bleached staring yellow, and her cheeks painted a shrieking pink, dancing till all hours at the Casino with any cheap man she could pick up on the boardwalk! Ida, with Don worshiping the ground she trod on—Don, who had never even kissed another girl—Ida trying clumsily to attract flashily well-off rounders to pay for a few drinks and dances and roadhouse dinners!

The first thing we thought about was not so much Ida's wickedness as her amazing idiocy. The next was a feeling of resentment. To think of her doing such a thing to Don! Little, quiet Ida, who had been going around in Don's reflected glory these ten years, and glad to get the chance! It was more than wicked—it was downright impertinent! We felt, we who loved Don, as if she had slapped us in the face. And it was so incomprehensible.

It could not have been Don's goodness that she cared for, we thought, nor even his good looks, nor his charm. What had attracted her in the man she married must have been his great strength, that Arthurian prowess which had made him a notable figure all up and down the coast. She must have

taken that prowess as an earnest of some thrilling domination in him, some masterfulness or brutality. And Don, unfortunately for his married happiness, was exceptionally far from being a brute. He was a very perfect, gentle knight, who could no more have "done any despitefulness to a lady" than Sir Launcelot. Most girls think they want masterfulness —till they marry. Then they are glad enough if they find their wills unbruised by irrational lordliness. But Ida, little animal that she was, seemed to have needed, and indeed longed for, the excitement of the whip. And she was married to a man whose gentleness and courtesy were as unshakable as his own great power.

Of course she couldn't understand Don's attitude toward her in her misbehavior. Neither could we, at first. But it was the old Don-attitude. That strange inability to be anything but magnanimous to any one in his power held him still. He guarded Ida as if he were her father. He kept her from what he could, and when he could not he went with her to her questionable places, to give her at least the shelter of his presence. He learned to dance so that he could be seen at the dance-places with her. He went to the drinking-places with her and her men. You would see him sitting there with them,

like a big brown statue in the middle of a lot of silly wax figures, always gravely courteous.

Also he did his own man-work and Ida's mother-work. He would come home from his office at night and care for the boy, whom Ida had tired of as casually as if he were a doll. And our hearts broke.

Quincy Ferrier, who loved Don more than he did his own people, went over to see him one hot night when he knew Don would be at home, working. He found him in the little mission living-room, figuring at a table. His boy lay fast asleep on the table on couch-cushions, shaded from the drop-light, with both fists curled up under the little face so absurdly like his father's. Don looked up with his vivid smile as Quincy passed in through the open door, set wide to let in the night breeze.

"Hello, old boy!" he said cordially. "What are you doing so far from the electric lights this sort of a night?"

Quincy's throat hurt as he looked at Don—he was so splendid, and so cruelly young to be sitting there alone under the weight of his sordid tragedy, guarding his boy.

They slid into commonplaces for a while. Quincy had the hardest work ahead of him that he had ever

done, and small blame to him if he dallied a little. Finally Don threw his arm over Quincy's shoulder.

"What is it, Quincy?" he asked. "Anything I can straighten out for you?"

"I don't know," Quiney burst out, "but, oh, Don, I'd give anything in the world if you could!"

"Tell me about it," said Don.

Quincy Ferrier stared straight ahead at the green art-glass light that thrust out over the shiny, empty new fireplace.

"It's—it's Ida, Don," he began desperately.

Don's hand clasped down a little heavier on Quincy's shoulder.

"I know," he said gently, "I know, and it's like you to care, Quincy. But you can't help things—nobody can. I married her, so I've got to look after her the best I can. I'm responsible for her, you see. Now don't let's talk about it any more."

So they did not talk about it any more. When Quincy went away that night late, Don was still sitting under the bright light, working, with the sleeping baby among the litter of his papers; young and gallant and alone.

And there was no way to do anything to Ida. That was the tough part of the whole thing.

It was scarcely a month later that Ida planned a

party which was to have an extensive alcoholic feast at as late an hour as possible, in as yellow a café as could be found in the vicinity. Don went with her. She had not wanted him to know about it, but she made a sulky best of it.

They were a creditable enough crowd as far as appearances went. Ida's latest was the kind whom dissipation makes hollow-cheeked and deep-eyed, not red and puffy. In fact, he was a cocainer, by which you may see that Ida didn't much care, so it was a good spender. Ida herself was always a pretty little thing enough, in spite of her heavy hand with the make-up. Her shoulders were half out of her orange satin, and she was making crude but rather effective play with her man. The girl next Don was a slim, scarlet-cheeked affair with black hair and long eyes and a floppy scarlet frock that matched her cheeks. She was being nice to Don and he was being about as responsive as a man on a magazine-cover. That is, as his scarlet-cheeked partner probably counted responsiveness. He was pleasant enough to her, of course. Whether he loved Ida still or not, nobody knew. It didn't seem likely. But neither, to us who knew Don, did it seem likely that he would ever care for anybody else. But the scarlet girl couldn't know that, I suppose. As for

the other two couples, they were the background kind, fillers-in.

We looked at the party sitting there laughing in the lights, and looked hastily away. It hurt to see Don guarding that worthless little thing, and fettered to a course of action as far above her understanding as it would have been above a spaniel's.

A little laugh and whisper that ignored Don went round their table. The scarlet girl braced indignantly, then, seeing Don had apparently not noticed, went on hurriedly talking to him. Ida was ridiculing him, of course, scoffing at his patience. Don went evenly on with his talk to his partner, with his drink scarcely touched.

"Sure," Ida had whispered, giggling hysterically, "he isn't among those present 'cause he likes good times. He's chaperoning me, that's what he's doing. Wish he'd cheer up a little bit! Makes me tired, sitting there like a mummy."

"I can liven him up, I bet you," whispered Ida's man. "Want me to?"

"M'hm," said Ida expectantly. "Bet you can't!"

"Can't I, dearie?" he whispered back, "just you watch!"

It was really admirably clever, the way he slid

a thick pinch of powder from some hidden pocket into Don's cocktail, where it sank and dissolved.

"Now, get him to drink it, and if he doesn't cheer up right away, I'm a liar!" he said. He cheered himself behind his napkin with the like powder furtively as he spoke. "Make him drink it," he told Ida, "and the coke'll do the rest."

Ida wasn't feeling any too kindly to Don that night. Sometimes she was willing enough to have him around, for the sake of the respectability his presence gave her. But tonight he interfered with her plans, and she was cross accordingly. She felt malicious, and like doing any little thing to Don she could. She sent another whisper around the table, to watch the fun, then set the whole pack on him.

"Don isn't drinking his one little cocktail, bunch," she called out to the tableful. "Little Donald, the temperance advocate! Go on, Don, be a sport! Finish it!"

She brought the whole of them, warned of the joke, swooping down on Don, demanding shrilly that he drink his cocktail. That is, all but the scarlet girl. They had learned that it wasn't much use to invite her to help in a joke on Don.

It didn't matter especially to Don whether he

drank his cocktail then or not, so he finished the howlings as swiftly as possible by swallowing it. Ida leaned back to her man, the other women leaned back to theirs, and the whisperings and drinkings went on again, all of them watching Don expectantly at intervals. There was no perceptible effect on Don. The scarlet-cheeked girl leaned to him again and moved her white shoulders at him, and lured him, the only way she knew, with lips and eyes and hands and provocative whispers. He answered her, as gently courteous as before. That was all.

The others, watching, felt cheated. So did Ida, especially.

"What sort of livening up do you call that?" she taunted her partner. "What did you give him, Mellin's Food? Thought you were a regular little devil that used real cocaine."

But the man's sense, drug-sharpened, felt something wrong.

"Better be careful," he said. "He may get ugly or paralyzed. We'd better beat it for the car."

"Aw, piker!" said Ida, and leaned farther toward him. He shrank away. He had awakened to the fact that Don had turned from the girl in scarlet, and was openly, silently watching Ida, the pupils of

his yellow-brown eyes dilated like a cat's. Don watched a long minute. Then he spoke softly, clearly:

"Cut it out, Ida," he said.

Ida laughed and leaned nearer the other man.

"Did you hear me, Ida?" Don asked, still quietly.

"Oh, yes—I heard you!" she said. She laughed shrilly, turning her bare shoulder to him, and flung her arm around the other man's reluctant neck.

The next thing that happened was that Don sprang straight at Ida's man like a big cat, and threw him on the floor as if he were an old coat. He struck Ida aside in passing—only in passing—but the force of the blow sent her hard against the next table, where a glass, breaking, cut her face. She picked herself quietly up and sat down again, pressing her cheek with her napkin and watching Don. She looked for all the world as she had always looked, sitting still and complacent in a good place on the sidelines, watching Don at some feat which reflected its glory on her.

It looked ghastly—Don Andrews making a brutal scene in public—Don Andrews savagely punishing a man who had no chance whatever with him!

There is a thing the doctors tell you about, called

inhibition. A muscle, or perhaps a kinked nerve, closes down on some other muscle or nerve, and locks it. The locked muscle is all right—perfectly well and strong—but you have no more use of it than if it were not there.

I think Don's self-restraint and magnanimity, all the years he had been stronger than anybody else, too powerful to use his power without selfishness, had locked the strength down. He literally had not been *able* to let go and be self-interested, even when his life-happiness was in question. It was an inhibition. And the cocaine had broken it for a while. The knight was released for a little from his vows.

The amazing part of the whole thing was the quietness of it, and the way we all stood back in our ring like people at a play and let it happen. Except for Ida's half-cry and the slight crash of glass at the beginning of things there had been scarcely any noise. You see, the majority of the people there that night were townspeople who knew Don and his story. We would not have lifted a finger if Don had killed the man outright—yes, and beaten Ida, worthless little painted animal that we held her! The other two men of the party had left unobtrusively at the first possible moment. As for

the other girls, they stood and watched the fight almost with Ida's expression of pleased admiration. Only the slim girl in scarlet was opening and shutting her hands and breathing so you could hear her.

You cannot break a broken man, but Don came near accomplishing the impossible. The man cringed and jumped if he was spoken to or touched suddenly, for months afterward.

"You come with me," Don flung to Ida when he had made an end, turning from the stained and crumpled thing on the floor. He used precisely the tone you use to a disobedient dog. And Ida, her face still lighted with the rapture of his fight, followed with a dog's swift, worshiping abjectness.

The people from the tables went softly back to their places, taking the long breath one draws when a thrilling play is done. The proprietor came and began zealously to pick up the pieces and help the policeman who drifted in to hunt for people to arrest. He looked contented, in spite of his spoiled glassware. He knew Don, too.

Don walked rapidly home, never looking at Ida. She had trouble keeping up, but she toiled along bravely, never asking any halt or mercy. When they reached the bungalow she was too spent to do anything but drop on the living-room couch and

pant for breath. But she never took her watching, adoring eyes off Don.

He sat down at his table and looked at her in the old quiet way. The cocaine had died out of him, leaving no particular after-effects.

"I'm going to divorce you, Ida," he said slowly. "I don't think I can stand any more of this. I'd let you get the divorce, but you might be given the boy, and I can't risk that. Better go upstairs now and get some sleep. You have a lot to do tomorrow, getting packed."

"You're going to get rid of me?" she asked. He nodded. "Well, I don't blame you," she said, getting wearily off the couch, "and—I forgive you."

Don looked as if she had taken leave of her senses, and as she crossed the room she laughed a little, a mournful little attempt at a laugh. "You think that's the finishing insult, don't you? I suppose it is—and yet—I've a good deal to forgive you for, Don!"

Don did not answer. It seemed scarcely worth answering, of course. Ida stopped where she was, at the door, and turned on him, speaking now with a fire he had never seen in her before. She looked straight at him and her eyes held his.

"Oh, yes, I know very well you've kept straight and I haven't—and that mighty few men do. But that—it wasn't fighting temptation—for you. You're better than most people. And I'd rather you'd have done something like that than what you did to me—it'd have been kinder!"

"What do you think I have done?" he asked. He wondered if she were partly insane—if all her behavior since their marriage had been, after all, the action of a deranged mind. Ida straightened herself against the door. Her tears had dried, and streaked the rouge, but there was a dignity in her expression that he had never seen before, as if she felt right to be on her side.

"I've never had any chance to be happy," she said, "that's all! You were the biggest and best and strongest boy in the Park when you picked me out to go with. I was ten and you were twelve. Of course I was proud—anybody'd have been. And of course, after that, I belonged to you, so far as everybody felt, as if you'd bought me—as long as you chose to keep me. You chose to keep me always. I didn't like you more than any of the others. I never loved you. I went because I was little and docile and proud of being noticed. There wasn't any choice. And I might as well have

walked into a jail because I thought it was a pretty building. After that there wasn't any *me*—just Don Andrews' girl."

She stopped for breath. "Go on," said her husband quietly.

"It sounds like nothing to you," she said, "but it was everything, all the time, for me. No other boy ever thought of asking me to do anything. The girls, even, left me out of things rather, because I belonged to you so entirely—I might as well have been a married woman since I was ten. You were so strong, and every one worshiped you so—why, they envied me, all those twelve shut-up years, as if I was a queen! And there wasn't anything to do but go on being a queen. I never even thought of breaking away. I thought when we were married I would find all the things and all the happiness I'd been missing, and feeling as if it was my fault I missed all those years. I didn't. I liked having a house of my own, for a while, and a baby. But pretty soon the old dreadful empty feeling came back—I wasn't *me*. I'd never had a chance to be *me*, or to be young, or free, or have a good time of my own. I'd never been in love. I'd never been courted. And now there wasn't any marrying to look forward to—*nothing* to look forward to!"

Then I found out that there were men who'd look at me—there *were* good times I could have, I, Ida, not Don Andrews' girl! I'd never had a lover, nor any freedom—any girl good times. You kept me out of all that with your ownership. Oh, it wasn't very funny, after all—but I was me, anyway. Those brutes I went with, they treated me as if I was a separate human being, not your household goods. I went with brutes because only brutes would have done it. Love them! I tried hard enough to, but I've never loved any man—never been given the chance. And then—well, tonight, when you smashed things up so and acted for the first time as if I was worth defending—I felt as if I loved you. I never did before. I don't see why, because you were just rubbing in all the ownership I'd resented so long—but I did—and I do.

“Funny, isn't it, that I should forgive you, and love you, just when you're hating me and putting me out of the house? And it would sound funny enough to anybody to hear *me* talk about forgiving *you*! Well, I do. Only remember—I wasn't ever *me*. I was just Don Andrews' girl. And—it's me, of my own free will, that loves you now, if that helps you to get back at me more. I've messed

everything. You've more than a right to get rid of me——”

Her face worked, and she turned hastily and ran out of the room. He could hear her flying feet on the stairs, and her sobs as she ran. Then, movements overhead, and after a while, silence.

Don sat still where she had left him. He sat there rigid for half an hour, staring straight ahead. Suddenly he rose and went upstairs.

Ida, clad in her street clothes, was kneeling by her locked trunk. Her head was down on one arm. The other hand, out-thrown, was clenched on something. He laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Ida,” he said, “do you want to try again?”

BLACK MAGIC

NAOMI AINSLIE looked out the window thoughtfully. It was half-light in her studio; her friend Leila Adair, watching her, could scarcely see more than the outline of her head, with its smoothly brushed hair and colorless, regular profile. They had both been quiet for a long time.

"I'm glad Ethan's happy," she said finally, though they had not been talking of her cousin Ethan, nor, indeed, of anything, for half an hour. "But it seems strange that it should be Ethan, not Quincy. It was always Quincy who had everything on earth that people could give him, like the prince in the fairy tales. And Ethan has always carried the burdens and been in the background."

"I think that's all the more reason why Ethan should have a chance," protested Leila vigorously. She had been lounging luxuriously in Naomi's big chair, plump and duskily pretty in the fire-light; now she sat intently forward. "I haven't seen Quincy for years. But he was always a charmer; the gayest, handsomest thing you ever saw.

He could get anything he wanted, out of anybody, and yet he played fair."

"Both the boys play fair," said their cousin loyally. "And I only wish there'd been enough happiness to go around. But of course there isn't much, most places. There's fun, thank goodness! And there's consciousness of rectitude, or whatever you call it. That's really a lot of help, when you happen to have been brought up to be good whether or no."

When Naomi began to talk Leila generally let her philosophize as long as she wanted to, because it wasn't often she would do it. And she had an uncanny way of learning things about people which most don't get told.

"It was because Quincy always did get the most out of life that it seems strange he isn't going on with it," she said.

"What was it?" demanded Leila plumply.
"Was it anybody's fault particularly?"

"Well," Naomi answered slowly, "of course nothing in the world is absolutely one person's fault. Sometimes it seemed to me more like black magic than anything else. But any amount of people and things and environments, most of them well-meaning, are to blame every time something

breaks. Yet it does seem to me that if Catherine's own people had been just a little more fantastic in their point of view nothing need have happened. If they hadn't tried to make a conventional young lady out of a woman who could have been the leader of a great movement or the prophetess of a faith——

“But there it is again. They saw things as most fathers and mothers in the world would have seen them, from the sensible, walled-in cell of middle-age; as Catherine herself might have seen them if she had married and had daughters of her own.”

“Catherine? What Catherine?” asked Leila.

“Catherine James—don’t you remember little Catherine over in Allenwood? Her people never let her play much with the Park children. They made an exception of me on state occasions, I suppose because I was the minister’s daughter.”

“I—think so,” said Leila slowly. “She had long fair hair, and a sort of surprised look. And she never talked much.”

“Yes. I lost sight of her after mother and I moved away. Then we came back on business, years later. We were all grown up then. Catherine was about twenty-six, I think. She was thirty

the last time I saw her—and the last time Quincy saw her. Do you know Mira Doremus?"

"She acts Ibsen, doesn't she? And they say she throws things at her maid," said Leila, taking the abrupt change coolly.

"I can't imagine her doing anything else," said Naomi, coolly also. "Incidentally some one told me that she's a nervous wreck; that she can't act much longer. I can't say I'm sorry. Oh, well—Mira couldn't help being what she was, either . . . I suppose. . . . She always reminded me of some destructive natural force. She mayn't have been normal, but she was amazingly dynamic, and people say now that the way your brain is built is responsible for whether you are kind-hearted or not. She was always a little afraid, herself, of going mad, I know. No, I suppose in a way it was nobody's fault. But I always wanted to have Mira punished for it. Such as she usually got poisoned in the end by some anonymous person, in their proper habitat, the Renaissance. Those good days are over, alas!" She turned to face Leila, almost invisible now in the gathering winter darkness, and swept ahead with her story.

"Catherine James was the stuff from which are made saints and martyrs and perfect mothers. She

was strong and single-hearted and—there are very few people to whom the word really applies—nobleminded. I have never known her to believe even the most obvious evil of any one. Yet—strong? I scarcely know. Perhaps I should have said strong to endure. It was never a strength of aggression.

“She grew up clipped into conventional shape by a mother and governess who were even more afraid of ‘queerness’ than they were of undesirable friends. If you have fine enough material you can twist it into almost any shape, and Catherine at twenty must have been as good a semblance of your sensible, narrow-interested, pleasure-loving girl as heart could wish—or break over. All the wild white dreams had been laughed down and scolded under and hushed out of sight. Catherine was the kind of girl your own people hold up to you as an example.

“If she had been the ordinary romantic, sentimental dreamer it would have made no difference. She would have enjoyed not being understood, and married somebody on the strength of it, and everything would have been all right. But she was greatminded, which means humble-minded, and when they told her that to be unusual was to be wrong she believed it. The little people around her said

she was silly. They were older than she, so of course they knew, she thought; and she crowded under all the wild, innocent, noble wishes and desires and struggles and beliefs that go to the making of heroines, and hid her Shelley and Kant away, and dutifully read young-girl books that bored her piteously. At twenty one will do almost anything not to be different. Of course all the realities in her were burning hard, ready to break through at a touch.

“ Well, the touch came—through a perfectly proper, meritorious church-work errand. The Girls’ Friendly, or some such thing, sent Catherine to visit, among others, a girl named Mira Doremus. Mira was sixteen then, and she and her aunt had just come to the Park—flotsam, like the rest. She is a great actress now, Mira, married to a foreigner with a title, her second husband, I think: but then she was merely a thin, wistful-looking child with hungry black eyes and a mop of incongruous light-brown hair. Nine years afterward Catherine told me about their first meeting, dwelling on the little details as a mother dwells on the things a dead child has done.

“ ‘ She was sitting quite alone in a high green chair in the very middle of the room, like a little

princess,' she said. 'She rose and took both my hands, and said in that wonderful voice of hers, "So you are the Catherine they said I should love! I think they were right."

"I don't know what Catherine answered. I don't believe she knows. But Catherine had met Romance.

"Of all Mira's gifts the most subtle and wonderful is her capability of making you feel that to you, and you alone, she is most attuned. And you know that Catherine had never found any one like herself in all of her life before. Can you imagine the stifling loneliness of it? And can you think what Mira seemed to Catherine? All the things they had told her were foolish, the things that were everything to her, Mira divined and echoed and made great. All the questionings and breaking of conventional idea and belief that Catherine had dreamed and wondered over secretly, Mira played with unafraid. And Mira, wrapped in that subtle quality, magnetism, charm, personality—call it what you will—exerted every scrap of power in her to hold Catherine. She loved her genuinely for a while. She's still fond of her in a way, I think. Catherine is a very lovable person. She was even more lovable then, according to Mira. 'A Gabriel

Max Madonna with a touch of Brunhild,' is Mira's description of what Catherine was at twenty. Mira always speaks in hyperbole—she sees things that way. Life is all Turner sunsets and Ibsen dramas to her. But Catherine at twenty must have been very lovely, for she is sweet-faced now. She had the coloring of apple-blossoms, Mira told me, and her fair hair was so heavy that it massed naturally around her face, like a halo. The 'touch of Brunhild,' the height and straightness, the boyish, austere impatience of shams and sentimentalisms and pettinesses—she has them still.

"Some people cannot give all of themselves to any one, even if they want to.—Catherine has never been able to give except entirely. Such people as she always do throw down everything at once. They would be glad if their love were returned, but if it isn't—why, that doesn't stop them from giving. Mira, with her wonderful gift of feigned likeness of soul, drew out of Catherine, or was freely given, everything. Then she began to hurt Catherine as much as she could, to see how much power she had, and just how far Catherine would bear. I suppose power was a new plaything for her in those days, and she wanted to see what she could make it do.

"She did everything to Catherine's soul that an ingenious mind, interested in proving its own power, could suggest. You know how people can hurt you when they know everything about you, and your least, most noble (which can be made most ridiculous) inward feelings. They have what Holmes calls the 'back-door key' to your soul, and they can enter at will. The better you are, the larger-minded, the more forgiving, the happier hunting-ground there is for people with a fondness for soul-vivisection. Mira knew that whatever she did to Catherine's feelings, for very loyalty's sake Catherine would pretend not to be hurt.

"It may have been good for Catherine, in a way. I know that she thinks it was. Mira boasted to me once that she had 'developed and strengthened the range of Catherine's emotions.' Doubtless she told the truth. She did make out of her a most wonderful instrument for the registering of fine shades of feeling. Like her predecessors in the molding of Catherine, she had fine material to work in. She had Catherine's nerves trained at one time to the thrilling, fine responsiveness of violin-strings, and—Mira played the violin. No one took what went on with any particular amount of seriousness. They were both so young, you see. By the time any one

noticed, and it took some years, it was too late to do anything.

"So when I knew the girls, Catherine was beyond the most acute suffering-point, or was trained to a very wonderful stoicism. I think myself that the vibrations were deadened, spoiled by overuse. You can't suffer, even at the hands you love best, beyond a certain point.

"It was at Mira's I met Catherine again for the first time since those visits of state in our childhood. I remembered her, of course, but I scarcely noticed her at first, I was so under the spell of Mira's slow, thrilling voice and passionate personality. Gradually she became a real figure to me, the smiling blonde girl who was always in the background, smoothing down the sharp things Mira said and showing off the flattering ones. Something, finally, in her attitude, a certain determined lightness of manner at variance with a natural placidity and dignity, attracted my attention sharply. Anywhere else I would have seen nothing incongruous, but at Mira's one was in a state of heightened mental tension which took note of morbidly small things—a sort of clairvoyance. Mira's atmosphere—well, some one described her once as a 'mental cocktail,' and it wasn't bad. You would spend a

tense evening talking to her, and go home with mind and body keyed to the height of their powers, as if you'd been taking a drug. Indeed, the next day you would be quite as exhausted as if the drug had been a physical reality.

"The first time I saw anything real of Catherine was a night when Mira kept me too long for me to be able to get home. Catherine volunteered to put me up for the night. All the way back to her house and for hours afterwards, we talked of Mira, how wonderful she was, what a living force—

"'But she's—cruel, isn't she?' I asked timidly. I was young, and not quite sure, as yet, how much one might speak of emotions. But I had to—emotions were what Mira exhaled. She played on your nerves, and deliberately woke for her own interest all those elemental feelings you had supposed were only in book people—not you.

"'Cruel?' said Catherine with her little laugh. 'Yes, I suppose so, but don't you think she's worth it? She can give you—thrills. Thrills are all that's worth having—don't you think so?'

"This was what Mira had done to her in four years.

"We went on talking—talked late into the night. Both our tongues were loosened by the strong stimu-

lant of Mira's personality. Catherine showed me, little by little, all the soul of her: the amazing loyalty, the honesty and innocence of purpose, the thwarted instincts of protection and motherhood—and the cruel havoc, too, that Mira had wrought. Mira had made Catherine so that her chief desire was for emotional excitement—‘thrills’— She had taught her to analyze herself as she analyzed others, and to find her greatest interest in people's feelings. It sounds overstrained, I know, but it reminded me of the superstition that if a vampire sucks your blood something of the vampire nature is left in you. Mira had laid Catherine's soul out and dissected it till the girl herself learned to take an interest in the process. Mira could not kill the gentleness, nor the instinct of motherhood, the guardianship of anything weak or hurt, nevertheless, she had taught Catherine something which was a passionate, selfless sympathy, but which still watched your soul hungrily for signs of its workings—even while she helped it through some black, terrifying place.

“She was trained, too, to a curious scorn of men. Mira had the Brunhild austerity of her to work on in the beginning, of course. The love and protectiveness that goes with the type Mira diverted to

herself; the mating instinct, of no use to her, she tried to crush out. Mira's own attitude to men, at that stage of her development, was inevitable. She did not attract them, then; she alarmed them by oddness; so she hated them, and trained her devotees to hate them too. It was a self-defensive, automatic thing. You couldn't like a man and Mira at the same time. So Catherine crystallized Mira's mood of the time, and despised men with her whole innocent, serious mind.

"The more you knew of Catherine the lovelier she was. Long after I had seen all that was necessary to conviction of Mira's temperamentalisms, Catherine and I were very close to each other. Mira's schooling had made her the ideal friend; I suppose she knew what not to do to the last iota. But she never spoke of herself, only of yourself—and Mira—things you were interested in—and Mira—music and books and pictures—and Mira. She talked wonderfully, wisely, with a tolerant sympathy and interest for everything, but Mira was the continuous overtone of it all. I don't mean that she spoke of her so much. It was, as well as I can describe it, that Mira was in the air when you were with Catherine, affecting your senses as vividly as the faint wood-violet scent Catherine always had on.

She was a part of Catherine's life in the literal sense of the phrase.

"Once Catherine tried to break the spell. It was after a very cruel scene with Mira, who was angry with some one else. She wasn't sufficiently sure of the other girl to act to her as she felt. So she summoned Catherine, late at night, and spent four solid hours wilfully wounding and insulting and humiliating her by every means in her knowledge, all in that wonderful, 'cello-like voice that Catherine loved so dearly. Catherine sat under it all silently. In the end she rose, dazed, and—if you can believe it—not resentful in the least; only hurt, hurt, hurt so badly that it was worse, she told me, than any physical pain she had ever known.

"'I don't think we had better see each other any more,' she managed to say in a low voice, rising to go away. Mira darted after her and caught her wrist hard.

"'You'll be the first to crawl back,' she said. 'I may take you if you are very abject! Now, go!'

"Catherine went home physically ill. It was a week before she ate or slept normally. After that she held no communication with Mira for a month. She sent back all her letters, and her maid answered the telephone and refused her to Mira about once a

day. Catherine used to lie on her couch, she said, gripping its sides with both hands to keep from rising and taking the receiver herself and replying. But finally she fought herself to a point where she could think of Mira quietly, and with no desire to see her. If her mother had been willing to have her go away for a while just then I think she could have got free enough to hold firm, for Mira's spell is a personal one to a great degree, weaker the farther away she is. But for some reason it was not convenient, and Catherine's mother would not let her go. Fascination and the power of personality were as ridiculous to the mother as a belief in ghosts. If Catherine's loyalty had permitted her to tell her mother some of the things Mira had said to her Mira would never have been allowed in the house again, I know. Unfortunately, those were just what Catherine would not tell.

"The end of it was that Mira slipped into the house unchallenged one day, gained Catherine's sitting-room, and fled across the room into her arms.

"'Oh, comfort me, comfort me!' she sobbed. 'I've been so wicked and cruel to you that I can never be happy any more!'

"Catherine, worn and blanched as she was with the struggle Mira had caused, sat up and closed both

weak, protecting arms around Mira and—comforted her. The fetters were locked on again.

“All this was a long time before Catherine met Quincy. She was thirty when he came. Mira was away. It was at my house they met.

“Catherine is not the kind that has many lovers. Even if she wanted them, she demands a very great deal, and stoops to none of the little alluringnesses men desire. Any lover of Catherine’s would have to go all the way alone without help from her. But Quincy was ready and glad to go every inch of the way. He loved her as soon as he saw her. He did not, or I think not, see all the high, brave soul of her, under the sweetness and straightforwardness that were her most visible charm. But what man ever does love a woman for the things in her that are most loveworthy? Quincy cared for her so entirely that whatever she did or was or said was perfect because she did it, and would have been—will be—to the end of time. He was a man any girl would have been glad to marry, aside from the worldly part of it, for his sheer sweetness and straightforward, gay strength and charm. Any girl, that is, not blinded and drowned in Mira’s ruthless fascination.

“Quincy laid siege to Catherine as steadily and

swiftly as if he had been one of the knights she used to dream about. Soon it seemed as if he had won. I was very, very glad, but a little frightened. It seemed too good to be true—too happy an ending for any one as strong to bear suffering as Catherine. They were so youthfully, carelessly happy—I never remember being as light-hearted as they were. It was the most beautiful thing to see them going about together, Catherine flushed and serious and girlish, and Quincy watching her in the unmistakable lover-fashion. It was so new to Catherine to be petted, and have her feelings considered and her wishes watched for, that she must have felt bewildered. She bought pretty, fluffy clothes and did her hair to please Quincy, and for one month she was a real, normal woman with a lover, and all the little vanities and foolishnesses and merriments that go to lover-time. She had been living so long on heights of strained emotion that this descent into the valleys must have been very wonderful to her. If any two people ever were brave and kind and merry, and absolutely fitted to make each other's happiness for a lifetime, those two were.

“Ethan and I met them one night in the lobby of a theater, in the city, after a musical comedy, talking nonsense to each other like a couple of children.

“‘She looks like a Christmas-card angel, doesn’t she?’ Quincy said fondly, looking down at her mischievously. I looked too, and smiled. She did indeed, tall and straight, and pink-cheeked with excitement, with her pretty fair hair all curled, and her blue eyes laughing and childlike above the swansdown of her long white cape.

“‘I’m not an angel, at *all!*’ she protested, laughing and glancing up at him challenge-fashion. He bent and whispered something that made her flush and drop her eyes.

“It was all such a poignant contrast to my first memory of Catherine, smiling and enduring behind Mira’s chair in that little room full of tense emotion, that something came over me—a wave of second-sight, I’ve thought since.

“‘Oh, Quincy, dear!’ I said, ‘I do wish you’d marry her soon—tonight—this week! Marry each other quick, before anything happens to stop either of you from being happy!’

“‘It would be an adventure, at least!’ laughed Quincy. ‘What do you say, Kitty—shall we take her and Ethan for witnesses, and go off and do as she says?’

“He loved her as much as a man can, but I don’t think he knew what he had achieved in winning her

through the crystallized distaste for men that Mira had taught her. He was just as sure of her, naturally, as he was of sunrise.

“‘Oh, no, no!’ said Catherine gaily. ‘What would happen to our lovely wedding and all the blue bridesmaids? We have all the rest of our lives to stay happy in.’

“‘If Mira lets you,’ I said involuntarily.

“The girl-look faded for a moment, and the old expression of devoted endurance crossed her face, followed by her little old Mira-laugh—not the childish mirth of girls with lovers.

“‘You always think Mira is so dreadful,’ she said. ‘She’ll like Quincy almost as much as I do.’

“But it was only three days afterwards that Mira came back and the thing I had feared happened. I never knew much more than the brutal fact that Catherine broke off short with Quincy. Mira needed her to sit behind her chair, with the old look of pleasant, patient watchfulness on her face, I suppose. At any rate, there were two evenings alone with Mira—and Catherine was back under the spell. Cocaine or opium would have been as easy a thing to fight.

“It was a long while since I had been near Mira, but I went straight down to the Park to see her then.

“How could you *dare* do what you did to Catherine? Do you know that you’ve spoiled her life and maybe Quincy’s?’ I cried out as she ran into the room, childish and vibrant and seductive as ever.

“ ‘Dare?’ laughed Mira, lighting on a corner of the table like a butterfly. She always seemed poised for the moment, rather than seated like other people. ‘Don’t be melodramatic, you foolish child! I haven’t done anything to Catherine—the thing’s ridiculous. Catherine doesn’t really care for the man at all. She doesn’t like men any more than I do. She was just amusing herself with him, I suppose. He’s ridiculous, too—forgive me, dearest! And Catherine’s a free agent—you know that perfectly well. You always talk as if I had her in my power, like a melodrama!’

“It does seem impossible and melodramatic, one woman’s complete power over another by sheer personal influence, and Mira knew it and acted on it in all her dealings with her satellites. She laughed at me, and then grew angry, and denied and mocked and laughed again—went through her series of moods artistically, and enjoyed herself very much. She knew there was nothing I could do, and I knew it, too.

"Quincy fought hard, of course, but what could any man do against Mira's powers of darkness? Mira had mocked a little and appealed a little and cajoled a little—and the thing was done. Moreover, Catherine denied in all sincerity that Mira had any connection with what she had done. She was mistaken, she said—it was not right for her to marry—there were other things to do in the world—that was all. It would have been the same, she said and believed, if Mira had never existed.

"Quincy went away, at last, out of the country. He made me promise before he went that I would send him word if ever Catherine expressed the least desire to see him. He is away still. I wish it hadn't been Quincy, of all people. Most men wouldn't have kept on caring. I never thought Quincy would; he was so light-hearted, and there were so many girls in his life. I'm afraid that senseless loyalty is a Ferrier inheritance—or, rather, Ainslie. Poor Aunt Lucina clung to Uncle Edward years after any other woman would have taken her children and gone away. They can't seem to deflect, once they really care. Like those poor souls in the poem who found the wrong island and colonized it, and had to stick to it, you know.

"Well, Catherine sat behind Mira's chair for two

years more, smiling and comforting the girls when Mira hurt them too much. Then suddenly the natural, inevitable thing—the thing that none of us had ever thought of—happened. Catherine called me hurriedly over the telephone one morning.

“ ‘Mira’s going to be married,’ she said breathlessly without preface. ‘*Married*. And . . . she always said marriage was dreadful and degrading. . . . I thought she didn’t like men. . . . Isn’t it—queer?’

“ Mira had taken Catherine from her lover. She had taken her from most of her friends. She had taken her youth, and deadened her capacity for the enjoyment of normal people and normal things. She had even taken her away from her God—that kind, concrete God, half Keats, half clergyman, whom Catherine used to go to for comfort when Mira hurt her first. She had put herself, Queen Mira, instead of all these. And now she was taking herself away.

“ Catherine’s voice was steady, and she told the story almost brightly. Oh, she had learned stoicism well! ‘Isn’t it—queer?’ That was all.

“ ‘But she doesn’t love him at all,’ she went on. I could see that there was a happiness to her in that last, forlorn comfort. ‘She is only marrying him

because he is rich and can put her on the stage—you know Mira will make a wonderful actress. He is mad about her—you should see him!'

"She was always so proud when any one was mad about Mira.

"There isn't very much more to it. Catherine was maid of honor at the wedding. It was a very beautiful wedding, and the man was undoubtedly mad about Mira, and she, in spite of her assurances to Catherine, was undoubtedly mad about him for the time. When they went away there was on his face, it seemed to me, Catherine's very set, bright smile, the mark Mira lays on her chief worshiper.

"Nobody wanted Catherine any more, but it was too late for her to swing to normal again. The last breath of her girlhood had died when she gave up Quincy. She is—what is it they say of steel that has been permanently warped by electricity? 'Depolarized' is the word, I think. Anyway, it describes what has happened to Catherine. There is the same set brightness about her that there was in Mira's day. She devotes a great deal of time to her mother, who likes being waited on. For interests, she amuses herself with little passing adorations of first one woman and then another. She laughs at anything you say about loving men or

children. But then she laughs a little at everything. So did Hugo's Gwynplaine, you remember.

"I don't mind," said Naomi passionately, "what women do to *men*. It's a fair game, as old as Eve, and the balance has always been on men's side. But to take a great white soul like Catherine's and set it to playing pitiful little games in the dust with little souls not worth tuppence—

"If it was Catherine's mind she'd hurt—but that's a clear, strong, straightforward thing, as it always was, and I've always understood that in any life hereafter your mind doesn't count much. It was the straightstanding, sweet soul of her, that might have been so great, that is crippled.

"She has one pitiful comfort left, I know. I don't often see her now, but one afternoon we met by accident, and fell to talking what Catherine calls 'insanities' in the old way. The talk swung round to reincarnation, and she said breathlessly and strongly, 'Oh, but it's so—it must be so!'

"I smiled.

"'One likes to play with the idea,' I said, 'but, dear, you don't mean that you really hold to the belief, as your mother does to predestination?'

"'I have to,' she said. Then she caught herself up, and laughed a little in the old way, to make her

words seem light. 'Mira and I have an appointment under the walls of Babylon in a thousand years, you know—just we two!'

"She laughed again, but I didn't dare to. I was afraid I would cry. . . . Mira has been in Europe a year now, and I don't think she writes to Catherine. I shall keep my promise and write Quincy tomorrow. I don't know that it will do much good—if there's enough of the Catherine he knew left to make it worth his while marrying. But a promise is a promise."

THE CONGREGATION

THERE is an animal well known to the wives and daughters of clergymen, though not listed in the Natural History books. It is rather a Scriptural-sounding beast, as is appropriate. It has at least from seventy-five to five hundred heads, and—if you will pardon the pun—much more than that number of tales. It is not highly intelligent, though sometimes it displays strong affection for its keeper. It is very powerful, unfortunately, for those who know most about it say that it cannot be depended on, any more than other semi-tame wild animals. It is called The Congregation.

Ministers' wives speak to it with nervous cordiality, and of it, among themselves, with a certain terrified mockery. They also have several proverbs about it, which they communicate only to each other.

The ministers themselves, like all actual keepers, don't see it that way. They feel—of course this is only in the smaller places, where pastor and Congregation deal with each other still by hand—what any good keeper feels: ownership, pride, affection,

and a perfect confidence that *their* Congregation will never bite *them*.

At least, to the Reverend Charles Ainslie, sitting happily one night in his study, the idea of a biting Congregation had never occurred. It was the largest, most luxurious study he had ever owned, for he had designed it himself in a wing of the pretty new church that was the work of his own hands and of his boyish, magnetic personality.

“Build a church or marry a wife—and go,” is one of the proverbs that the smiling, anxious-eyed clergymen’s womenfolk quote to each other. But the church was six active months old now, and the Congregation still thought their minister the most wonderful man that ever lived.

Mr. Ainslie thought that it was God, not himself, that his Congregation worshiped; for, like many another man with strongly winning powers, he knew very little about his own or other people’s motives. He was a man of about forty-five, handsome, strongly-built, and vivid enough to dominate the shabby clothes he wore. A passion for books in subscription sets, and a stronger one for financing derelicts, prevented him from spending much on dress.

It was the night Mr. Ainslie set apart for talking

to those of his Congregation who were in trouble and needed help. Tonight, however, was too cold for the Congregational drunkard—a most charming and cultivated person—to come over for a loan, or for the most conscience-stricken old lady to venture out in quest of the Unpardonable Sin and a cheering chat about herself. So Mr. Ainslie had what was a rare thing, a little time to himself. He let his little Greek Testament slip to his knee, and began to think how well his life was going and how kind it was of God to let it go so well.

“We are all well and happy,” he thought. “I have enough salary now to manage without getting into debt. And, best of all, the Congregation—my own dear people! I think they love me as much as I do them.”

His dark, handsome eyes rested on a painted text over the door—it was the one about the righteous never being forsaken—and his face lighted up with a passionate religious fervor which was as real a part of his nature as his gaiety and his tenderness for the people he served.

Just then somebody knocked at the study door.

The little, black-clad, blonde woman who entered breathed nervously, her hand a little obviously over her heart.

"It's only me—Mrs. Whitely," she said; and laughed embarrassedly.

She fidgeted into a chair and began to roll into a ball and then unroll the gloves she had jerked off. For a minute she panted—she did not speak.

"Isn't there something I can do?" asked the minister pleasantly. "Is your little daughter——"

Mrs. Whitely rolled her big, delft-blue eyes restlessly. They were incongruous eyes, set in her pale little face.

"Oh, Mr. Ainslie," she burst out suddenly, "I'm in such trouble—such trouble! And I says to myself, if anybody could help me my pastor could. So I came, though it's cold——"

She broke off suddenly and began to fidget again.

"Is it any trouble that I can help?" the minister asked gently again. In the back of his mind he was prepared to hear a long tale of her husband's shortcomings. Mrs. Whitely was reputed to lead Mr. Whitely something of a life. The lady hunted for her handkerchief and began. But before she had gone far she was on her knees beside the minister, clutching him, like a third act. The trouble with people like her is that they think they have to act, in stress of emotion, exactly like the people in inferior plays they have seen.

Her troubles, it appeared, were rather hackneyed, too. They seemed to be, principally, that the minister was married, and she was married, and she loved him, and she was sure he would love her if he only understood her. . . . And more—a great deal more.

Mr. Ainslie did what was the natural thing for a man with decent principles and a quick temper to do. He put the lady outdoors bodily—she wouldn't go any other way—and as he was in a hurry, having lost his temper, she was set on the edge of a snowdrift.

She stood still where she had been dumped, one foot on the walk and the other in a snowdrift. She was mortified and angry and revengeful and hysterically upset—in short, she was that rather worn-out figure, a Woman Scorned.

“I'll pay you for this!” she half-snapped, half-sobbed. “I'll pay you if I have to smash your old church to do it! I'll pay . . .”

He could hear her scolding shrilly at him till she reached the street, where she composed herself swiftly and stood still on the corner till her street-car came.

Mr. Ainslie held himself hard for a few minutes, till he was not angry. Then he said a swift prayer

for the woman; for he talked to God all day long, off and on, very much as you speak to a companion who walks beside you. Then he locked up his study and went home, around the corner.

Mrs. Whitely, also going home, in the car, stared at her black woolen gloves and planned. She had to plan how to turn her parlor carpet around so the worn part wouldn't show, and how to get a new hat out of her husband, and how to get back at the minister. It was quite a long ride home. By the time she had her latch-key out her arrangements were all made.

Mr. Ainslie said nothing to his wife about the episode. She worried too much about things, and, anyway, it didn't strike him as an important enough occurrence to mention. Mrs. Whitely was not the first or second or third woman who had gone through the performance. It is a part of the routine for most doctors and clergymen—annoying, but to be expected in the day's work.

So he went cheerfully on with his church duties and had a very good week, for he lured five hundred dollars for the church debt out of a rich old man who summered near by and liked him. He was also tricked by the same old man into accepting a new suit of clothes. He was vexed about this at the

time, but it turned out to be just as well, after all. He forgot all about Mrs. Whitely. Meanwhile that lady turned her carpet satisfactorily, induced her husband to buy her a new hat with ostrich tips, and found her plans generally working very well indeed.

Among the Congregation was a family named Christie. They were not of the élite who used almost good English and wore very good clothes, neither were they of the have-to-be-helped poor. Mr. Christie was a rarely seen, lank, grizzled plumber, with a draggled mustache and discouraged shoulders. His wife was little and faded and bird-like, with eyes that still languished at men. There were three daughters, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. The seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds were caressing, red-lipped, crudely alluring, and married swiftly before they were out of short dresses. The youngest, Hetty, watched life from under her eyelashes, and wondered when she would be married, too. She was in Mrs. Whitely's Sunday-school class, a slim, sidelong-looking girl with long-lashed evasive eyes and scarlet lips and a muddy skin. She wore her hair down her back and her skirts at her shoe-tops, but in several ways she was all grown-up. She

thought mostly about love, as interpreted by the books she read, which had names like "Beautiful Junie's Love-Test" and "Little Rosebud's Lovers." They were all about lovely sixteen-year-olds who loved men far above them, and secured them after every one who objected had been put out of the way. The principal difference between Hetty Christie and her Beautiful Junies was that Hetty knew a lot about men. What her mother hadn't told her she had inherited.

Hetty cherished a very romantic and passionate love for her middle-aged pastor, and her Sunday-school teacher knew all about it. When Mrs. Whitely had first discovered it she had wanted to kill Hetty, but presently she decided to do otherwise. Hetty didn't know anything about that, naturally, for even the cleverest sixteen-year-old can hardly see through a much older and cleverer woman of her own kind.

"The pastor's crazy about you, Hetty," whispered her Sunday-school teacher. "Anybody could see it." And she took Hetty home with her Sunday afternoon and gave her certain sound advice.

"Oh, but I wouldn't dare try *those* on the pastor," said Hetty, shivering. "Besides, he's so good it wouldn't work."

"A man's a man," said Mrs. Whitely. "You do what I tell you, dearie, and don't you be discouraged. And act as kiddish as you can."

So Hetty, with a throbbing heart, came and offered to help make a catalogue of the Sunday-school library. The Sunday-school was trying to pay for a stained-glass window on the each-member-raises-five-dollars plan, and Hetty wanted to make hers by means of the catalogue. She thought she could if the minister showed her a little.

"I—I'd *like* to do it," she said, looking sidelong at the minister from her low seat in his study. Her slim ankles were crossed under her short skirt, and she played nervously with the brown braid she had pulled over her shoulder. She was so obviously excited and terrified that the minister laid a warm, encouraging hand on her shoulder.

"Of course, you may, my dear child," he said cheeringly.

She eyed him sidelong again, and colored, and giggled nervously. But presently she was quite at ease, pattering around the place like a kitten. In a day or so the minister got quite used to her presence, and even enjoyed hearing her low, pretty voice humming snatches of street-songs above her books, and the useless, caressing little questions and

cheap little jokes with which she was wont to interrupt him.

After a while there began to be other things—a girlish arm slipped into his, a childish hand laid on his shoulder, a brown braid unplaiting itself by chance as Hetty stooped above him to whisper a foolish question. The minister found it pleasant enough, though it didn't suffice to tell him what Hetty thought it did. His own daughter of Hetty's age was a tall, shy child who read poetry-books and was innocently sentimental about Mary Queen of Scots and Sir Launcelot. That a girl no older than his Naomi could fall in love with a married man, especially with her pastor, never dawned on him.

Presently Hetty had the grippe, because her mother couldn't get her to wear flannels under her thin waists. She cried for the minister to come and see her, and they sent for him. She lay with her hair frizzled and spread loose over her pillow and with a flower in her hand that she had made her mother buy for her to hold. It seemed to the child like the wildest and most beautiful romance when the minister sat down beside her and took her hot little hand in his and said kindly that he had missed her. She lay in a trance of perfect happiness.

ness till his visit was over. When he was about to go she reached up one slim, feverish brown arm and pulled his face down to hers. The minister had been pulled down to kiss another child that day, it happened, a boy of eleven who adored him.

Hetty still lay in a daze of bliss when her Sunday-school teacher dropped in a couple of hours later.

“Oh, he kissed me!” said Hetty in a hoarsely rapturous whisper.

Mrs. Whitely felt another impulse to kill Hetty, but “I was sure of it,” she said. “Now all you got to do is play your cards right, dearie, and you got him.” She gave more advice.

Hetty was not paying much attention, but, anyway, it never occurred to her that there were difficulties. She was not really grown-up all over, you see. She smiled beatifically and planned a vista of impossible happiness after the manner of much triumphant melodrama. The other girls would watch her go through a thrilling scene or so in the Sunday-school room, the minister with his arm around her, defying every one for her sake She would run the Ladies’ Aid and snub several chosen girls from the Junior Endeavor. . . .

“Was your mother here when he kissed you,

darling?" asked Mrs. Whitely, across the tide of dreams.

"Oh, yes," said Hetty absently. "Oh, Mrs. Whitely, ain't he got wonderful eyes!"

But the lady had shopping to do, she said, and had to hurry off. Things were progressing even more satisfactorily than the parlor carpet had turned.

The wife of the Influential Trustee was a very good woman. She went on the principle, having only read about temptations, that if you had one you yielded to it. Her Jim, who was a boyish, warm-hearted sort of person as well as an Influential Trustee, had given up trying to love her, in bewilderment, some years before. It was like trying to scale a glass wall. He adored the minister, however, with a love that was part younger-brotherly and part hero-worship, and this irritated his wife, because she reasoned that a man who couldn't love *her* should not be able to love any one else. Mrs. Whitely, who had grasped these facts, went to call on Mrs. Stark. When her news was told she received the first welcome she had ever had in that house, and Mrs. Stark even unbent enough to be shocked along with her.

"Kissed her!" she repeated, her colorless eyes

hardening in her thin-lipped little face. "What else?"

Mrs. Whitely went on talking. When she was through the two ladies parted cordially at the Stark front gate, on their way to separate rounds of calls.

The first knowledge the minister had of anything was from Hetty herself. Her mother, questioned by various interested persons, had promptly taken the wise line.

"Hetty's an innocent child," she said, "an innocent child! She hasn't no notions of the vile matchinations of that there pastor. She's sick now with the shock of bein' kissed by him."

Then she scolded Hetty shrilly.

"Chasin' after a married man old enough to be your father!" she snapped. "That cat of a Whitely woman's settin' the whole Congregation by the ears, an' you mixed up in it, as if Lillie wasn't enough!" (Lillie was the second sister, married a little hurriedly the year before.) "You gotta stop bein' a little fool over him. You gotta tell everybody you didn't know what his wicked plans was."

Hetty rose up in her pink flannel wrapper with its coarse lace frills.

"I love him!" she declaimed, as Beautiful Junie would have done it, "an' I'm goin' to warn him!"

"Well, if you *will* be a fool!" said her mother resignedly . . . "Here's your stockin's."

Hetty, thin, fever-flushed, and trembling, burst into the study, where she found the minister alone. She poured out her story, clinging to his arm. The Congregation was going to indict him. Mrs. Stark (the money was in her right) might do unspeakable things. People had come and questioned her mother. And Hetty begged him to fly with her that night.

She did not leave him, as Mrs. Whitely had done, shrieking threats. She was younger and quieter, and she had loved him the best way she knew. She sobbed on her way home. She crept back to bed and kept on crying till her mother came and sympathized, and was confided in.

"He don't love me!" wept Hetty angrily. "He says—he says he never did."

"The coward!" said her mother hotly. "Well, just you tell everybody all about it, dearie, if they ask you—how he hunted you down, an' how noble you was about it, mother's poor little lamb!"

Hetty sobbed wordlessly on. But she was really

very much wounded by the minister's refusal to elope with her—she tried to hide from herself that he had very nearly smiled at the idea. So in the end she took the line of defense—or attack—that her mother counseled.

The minister, meanwhile, went home to his wife. This time he told her all about it, as far back as Mrs. Whately. He disliked worrying her, but it seemed time she knew.

"Oh, go to the Board of Trustees!" she begged. "Go to each of them personally and tell them your side first. Never mind if it does seem undignified; remember what a Congregation can do if it gets down on a minister. Think of poor Dr. Johnston last year, down in Riverton."

The things they had done to Doctor Johnston in Riverton had been rather unnecessarily brutal. Mrs. Ainslie's sensitive, aging face blanched at the memory and the warning it carried, and her mouth twitched nervously. But the minister threw back his head and laughed.

"Why, you little goose, my Congregation loves me too much to do anything like that!" he said. "You act as if it were some sort of a corporate wolf, instead of a body of intelligent people that I love and trust and—yes—have done a good deal

for. And, besides, it's all nonsense about the Starks. Why, Jim and I are like brothers."

"But it's *her* money," said Mrs. Ainslie under her breath. She was not only the wife but the daughter of a clergyman.

"Oh, Father, is anything going to happen?" asked his daughter, springing up in quick terror from the corner, and coming over to him with one finger still keeping her place in "*The Faerie Queene*".

"Nothing at all, my darling," he reassured her, putting his arm around her. "Only some little church squabble your mother and I are discussing."

"Oh," she said, with a vague trouble in her eyes.

She went back to her place not quite comforted. To her too that strong animal, the Congregation, was something to be dreaded.

Now, it may be that Mrs. Whitely by herself couldn't have done such a great deal. But with Mrs. Stark, rich, speckless, and white-hot with the zeal of purification, backing up Mrs. Whitely, a great deal was done. Mrs. Stark's experience in campaigning for charities proved especially useful.

So one night the minister, figuring at his table

whether or no the drunkard of the Congregation could be coaxed to take the Keeley cure, got a letter. It was signed by the Board, and it told him that he was going to have to justify himself before the Congregation for the various vulgar things they assumed him to have done. The Congregation, lately such an adoring animal, had turned on him.

Not all of it—there was a body of stanch old ladies who would have followed him through hell and after. Such of the poor people, too, as could afford to—such as had no hopes of aid from the Influential Deacon's wife's many charities—clung to their minister. There was a large enough minority to make it a long, humiliating, agonizing fight.

. There are few differences between the nerve-strains and humiliations of a civil and a religious trial; except that a real court may not ask certain insulting things, while a body of laymen with no manners and an uncontrolled curiosity and consciousness of entire mastery can go as far as it likes, with excited indecency. Sometimes after the evening's free-to-all horror Mr. Ainslie would laugh gallantly and compare the Congregation's doings to the Alice-in-Wonderland trial, with which it really had a good deal in common. Sometimes he

would go home from his star-chamber sick and white. He was brave, in the main, for he believed that the God he so loved would straighten things out for him in the end. He never once stopped believing that.

He did break down once, to be sure, one day coming back from one of the forlorn house-to-house canvasses he had been making, begging his Congregation separately to believe in him. He flung himself down by the dining-room table, his head in his arms.

“ Jim Stark is on the other side, Emma! ” he said. “ Jim! —and we were like brothers! ”

He sobbed there with his head on his arms among the nicked glasses. For it *was* hard—it would have been hard even on a man who had kissed a whole Sunday-school class. Stark, wife-ridden, boyish, affectionate, weak, had been Ainslie’s closest friend. When your wife is shrewish and holds the purse-strings, what can you do? But it was very hard for Mrs. Ainslie to comfort her husband that time.

The Reverend Mr. Ainslie and his household felt, all those days of sick suspense, as if they were crowded helplessly together on some scrap of land that was being washed relentlessly away; that the tide was gaining with a dreadful, sure swiftness,

and would presently sweep them down to bottomlessness. For they had not only to expect a disgrace and ostracism more entire than an ex-convict's, but if Mr. Ainslie was pulled down into the deep water—well, at forty-five a penniless, disgraced professional man hasn't much chance of earning a living. Doctor Johnston over in River-ton was trying to sell insurance. But it was known that he had occasionally to beg little sums of the people who had turned him out. If he hadn't the Johnstons mightn't have had enough for rent . . . Still, Mr. Ainslie hoped desperately on, and his wife pretended to, till it could not be done any more.

The Congregation tossed him his salary up to date, when it had finished with him. A trustee who kept a news-stand and was broad-minded threw in an extra ten dollars.

“I guess he'll need it, poor devil!” Mr. Ainslie was told he said. The whole Congregation felt a certain personal sense of virtue in that extra ten. Ainslie took it. He had to.

They lived on in the house they had rented, for it was taken till the end of the year. They could see the Congregation going to church every Sunday, and the pleasant times over the installation of the

new minister. It was believed that Mrs. Ainslie had found sewing to do for a mail-order house. It was known certainly that Mr. Ainslie sold his books, which he had held dearer than anything he owned—though indeed he never owned much else. But the sale didn't help a great deal, because the books were not at all dear to the unemotional second-hand dealer, and theology, as he explained, is a drug on the market, anyhow.

Mr. Ainslie tried to get various things to do. But he did not know how, for one thing, and, then, a minister whose Congregation has decided that he has kissed a girl is incapacitated in the general view for other professions.

But he had always said that God would be good to him in the end—and so God was; because after six months of useless work-hunting, and of being brave when the people he loved cut him and his wife and young daughter, he died of what the doctor explained was an over-strained heart.

He was simple-minded, and what is called conventionally religious, to the end. He talked about the angels he saw in the stuffy little room, and at the last spoke gaspingly to his wife and daughter about forgiving people, which they had not been able to do.

Naturally, it was Mrs. Stark, who had killed Ainslie for the zeal of righteousness, who came forward to offer to bury him. This was regarded by all the Congregation as a miracle of Christian kindness. She came late the night after he died. He was in the house still.

His wife would have accepted the money. [She was poor, and she was broken. But the young are improvident—not having yet learned how hard to come by money is and of how little account are other things.] Naomi, still in a shabby colored frock, bent forward across her mother.

“Mother isn’t to take your money,” she said in a quiet voice that was like a hard old woman’s. “If the county has to bury him it will be better than letting you do it. You have killed him, you and Mrs. Whitely and Hetty and the Congregation. I don’t believe there’s any Christ any more, nor any God. I don’t think there’s any Hell—there wouldn’t be any use of one, really. You are such a good Christian that I am telling you this to give you a little extra pleasure—you’ve killed his body, and what *he* would have called my soul.”

“Naomi! You are blaspheming!” cried Mrs. Stark. She was shocked, but she could not help

thinking that it showed what Ainslie really was, to have a daughter like this.

Naomi laughed, a hard little laugh.

“I’ll give God a chance,” said she, “for Father’s sake. Father had an interest in Him, unfortunately for him. If your church goes to wrack and ruin; if you are dragged in the dirt; if Mrs. Whitely is made openly infamous; if every man and woman in the thing—all the leaders—suffer; if old Gahegan, who was the most insulting of them all, is brought down to be a servant; if you, especially, have the worst and most humiliating things happen to you that could happen to a self-righteous, wicked woman like you—it would be losing your husband to Mrs. Whitely, I think—then I’ll consider God’s case. Maybe I’ll forgive Him. Not you. But that wouldn’t matter to God—He has nothing to do with you if He exists. Now, get out of the house, murdereress!”

Still self-righteous but a little frightened, too, Mrs. Stark went. She told herself that she went because she mustn’t be late for prayer-meeting. By the time she reached the church she was complacently angry, and agreeably conscious that, having offered charity to those who deserved none, she would nevertheless be nothing out of pocket. She

slipped into her pew and joined shrilly in the hymn . . .

Naomi stood quite still at the window, listening. Her mother, struggling out of a mist of tears for the dead, remembered the living.

“Naomi, dear—you mustn’t think such—such thoughts.”

Naomi lifted her hand quickly, her head bent a little. Faintly, like a muffled muttering, the low vibrations of an organ trembled through the little room. The voices were too far off for untrained ears to distinguish the words, but to the two women the hymn was made distinct by the mere mechanics of memory and association.

*Blest be-ee the ti-ie that binds
Our hear-rts in Chri-istian love!*

“Listen, mother!” Naomi laughed—a hard, mirthless little laugh. “I can hear the Beast—it’s made its kill, and it’s purring.”

THE FAIRYLAND HEART

CORINNA GOLDSWAITE lifted her dark, intense young face from its brooding over her window-box of pansies, and spoke to the others, standing at the far window.

"They're like the faces of strange, little dear animals," she said, "little elfin animals. Look, Belle."

Unknowingly her summons was to the man who stood with her cousin. Belle's was more frank.

"Oh, you must come and look, too, Mr. Raymond, unless you'd rather stay where you are," said little Belle coquettishly. She flung a glance over her shoulder at him, and he followed, though he had been standing quite untouched by Corinna's eager voice and speech. And this was strange, because all there was to Belle was the pink and white and golden of an apple blossom, and young as Corinna was she was already something of a personage.

Corinna's father had been a famous naturalist, their house, on the outskirts of Allenwood, where "old families" lived still, though summer-resort

houses were beginning to encroach, a place for pilgrimages. Corinna's own life had been what outsiders called a very beautiful one; her mother had seen to it that her childhood should be something to look back to joyously. "You can't take people's childhood away from them," she said, in the old country proverb. The little Corinna had been made free of all her father's wonderful friends; there had been trips abroad, music, beautiful pictures, an old garden to dream in, and always happiness of that kind—mystical, some call it—strained, others say it is—which is a product of the Puritan soul reaching after beauty. Her father was a New Englander of the best type; her mother less highly-bred, but kindly, and worshipful of her husband and her one child, both wonderful to her. Her genius was for loving. It was a love which never oppressed her people, earthly and anxious as it was. She surrounded them with it as if it were an ether. Corinna had grown up a wonder-child, praised and cherished by all her father's famous friends. Now, at twenty-one, she was a successful artist already, and a woman of marked personality as well. Perhaps this last was a little of a pity, for it kept people from remembering that she was young. There was a something eager, mystical, unusual

about her: something which made people who did not know her for Ira Goldthwaite's daughter feel nevertheless that she was *some one*. Nobody had struck quite the note she had in her sketches; fantasies and grotesqueries they were mostly, strange drawings for fairy-books. Her pictures made you feel that your own simple, old imaginings of yellow-haired, full-skirted fairies and honest, lumbering bears and giants were earthly and futile. Her fairy-folk were unearthly, elusive things; even her painted flowers and animals had a hint of

*The faint light subtly shining in
. . . The other wind within the wind.*

She lived half in what it pleased people to call a fairy-world. It was certain, at least, that she spoke of the Other People in as friendly and casual a way as she did of her friends and her books. The whole quality of her was unusual, fine, elusive. Even from her own mother she compelled a caressing homage.

So it was with the perplexed look of a young queen who sees her lady-in-waiting mistaken for herself that Corinna saw Henry Raymond turning swiftly at Belle's words. Belle was Mrs. Gold-

thwaite's niece, a typical small-town girl. She had lived in the Park, across the lake from Allenwood, and found the life of hurrying change and cheap gaiety in the summers and of longer flirtations on the deserted boardwalk in the winters, all that a life should be. But now that the Goldthwaites, after Ira Goldthwaite's death, had returned to Allenwood, Belle was trying to see something of Corinna. Corinna had responded graciously, but both girls found friendliness uphill work. There was so little to go upon.

Now, Corinna loved Henry, and she had thought he loved her. But Belle had been visiting Corinna for a fortnight, and . . . did he love Belle?

At least he was watching her intently as she bent over the pansies Corinna had praised.

"They have the sweetest colors!" Belle said. "And—oh, look! They just match my dress! I'm going to pick some to wear."

She broke them with a child's pretty ruthlessness, and glanced winningly up at Henry Raymond as she pinned them at her bosom. And then Corinna, who loved Henry, saw with the swift intuition that belonged to her that Henry did love Belle: little pink-and-white Belle, physically over-mature and aware, mentally a winsome, selfish child.

If Corinna had focused her own strange, dreamy magnetism on the man she might have won him back from her cousin. For Corinna was very strong-willed and compelling, one woman in a thousand; and Belle was only a little, ordinary seeker after love. But just because Henry was the only man who would ever be on earth for Corinna, she stepped back into the castle of her young maidenliness and shut the gate silently.

“Gather the rest of the pansies, Belle,” she bade with her strange, bright smile. “Then I want you to take Henry out and show him the little green pinewood I was telling him about yesterday, behind Allen Lake, the place where the Indian pipes grow so thickly in summer. You may find little red berries there even now.”

“Oh, but you were going to show him that!” demurred Belle, moving to get her wraps, even as she protested.

Corinna smiled again. It was not a young smile any more; almost the expression of a mother who is watching her children go out and play. She stood and watched the two pass gaily out of the house, forgetting everything but the frolic of being together. When they had disappeared she too went out, but in another direction.

There was a place she knew, a high, bare, wind-swept hill where she sometimes went secretly to watch the sunsets. It had about it an intensified quality of solitude, and it was there that the New England mystic of her could creep closest to God.

“God will be there now,” she said to herself, smiling still as she made her way to it. “Perhaps He will hold me from letting the selfish human part of me care too much.”

The sky was paling into a spring sunset. It held the dim, northern lights, faint rose, clear grays and sea colors; lights and tints more ethereal, of a more spiritual gate to Heaven than the fire-rose and fire-violet of midsummer. Corinna, with her strong, young love pressing heavy on her, watched the paling lights and felt the keen spring wind, and reached passionately after the feeling of God’s nearness that was always, for her, behind the shows and images of the world.

“It is only love that I have for Henry,” she whispered to herself, pacing swiftly up and down, tall and wind-blown, her great gray eyes fast on the sunset. “If we love people enough, it can only make us happy . . . Love is everything. It cannot hurt, it can only bless . . . I can be a

wind of love about them all their days . . . Why, nothing can ever hurt me again, if I can only love enough!"

For an ordinary woman that thought would have been a vain thing against the surging human forces that say ruthlessly, "I want! I want!" But Corinna was New Englander, artist, mystic; more than that, she was *une cérébrale*, one in whom feeling was strongly intellectualized. She had unusual powers of body and mind, powers that rayed from her, and moved others as she was moved. And all her own forces were turned inward on herself now, to hold her back from the purely human and selfish side of love—pain, chagrin, denied desires . . . She would give so much, so constantly, that she would have no time to take or even to ask. Nothing could hurt her any more; for she would love as God loved, not for return, but for pure joy of loving.

She watched the sunset till it was gone: then she went down in the dusk to her home. Henry and Belle would be there by now, talking to her mother: the dear mother, so full of little homely watchfulnesses and sympathies! A little before Corinna would have dreaded meeting her look of anxious, clairvoyant affection. But now it was all right.

There was nothing to be sorry about for her, no pity she would ever need again.

A quietness fell as she entered. There was an atmosphere of still radiance about her, of high peace. The lovers forgot the self-consciousness of their new secret, watching her. They forgot, too, to speak. She smiled at them serenely. She loved them very dearly.

“You are very happy, aren’t you?” she said gently, with a little laugh for their astonishment.

“Oh, how did you know?” cried Belle, coloring and flinging her arms about her cousin. Belle had felt a little triumphantly guilty before, for she knew she had tried deliberately to take Henry Raymond from Corinna—and won. Corinna’s attitude took from her both the feeling of guilt and the sensation of triumph.

“Perhaps the Good People told me,” Corinna answered lightly. “They sit to me for their portraits, you know. Why, you dear, silly people, it showed all by itself! . . . I’m very glad!”

The others laughed a little, now the tension was removed, and the evening went on in a tide of easy gaiety, Corinna sending the talk as she wished it to go. Only she saw her mother’s eyes, perplexed and watchful, fixed on her the evening long.

Her mother came to her next morning, where she sat at her drawing board. She bent down and kissed her.

"Is my little girl quite happy?" she asked wistfully.

"Quite and always happy," Corinna answered, smiling and returning the caress. "This is such a wonderful world, so full of people to love and things to do! How can I be otherwise?"

"That doesn't sound like a young girl's speech," said her mother. "Ah, well—I'm glad, my dear."

She looked wistfully at Corinna a moment longer, sighed and went out. Corinna went on with her work. She was illustrating an *edition de luxe* of Andersen, and had just reached "The Little Mermaid."

"It's going to be one of the best things I have done," she thought, as she traced in the young queen's extravagant, graceful draperies, and the slim, dancing figure of the Little Mermaid, with her upcurved arms and flaring mass of hair. "I must be putting my own happiness in it, I think."

It was, indeed, the best thing she had done. It was the set of drawings which made her rank as an artist. These pictures had a note new even to her, a sweet, sexless unearthliness that was arrest-

ing. They made you feel so peaceful, people said. The exhibition of them began a few days before she went to her cousin's wedding.

Years went along after that, but few outward and material things happened to Corinna. She read her mystical books and dreamed her mystical dreams, and painted her elfin pictures. The Park on whose outskirts they had lived crept out round them, but Corinna and her mother lived on in the roomy old house with its wide grounds. Corinna drew and dreamed and held court, and was happy. She had no more lovers. Men could not get near enough to her to love her as men love women. Of both men and women who cared for her as they would have cared for an angel, there was no lack. She grew to have more and more the quality which compels worship.

When Henry and Belle's oldest daughter was seventeen she came on from the distant town where the Raymonds lived, to stay with Corinna and her mother. She was interested in settlement work, and she could find plenty to do near Corinna's house. She was her cousin's namesake—Corinna Goldthwaite Raymond. She had Henry's tall slenderness and Belle's rose-gold coloring, and the quality of the dreamer.

Corinna and her mother were glad to have the girl with them. She was light-hearted and fanciful and responsive, and more of a companion to Corinna than any one had ever been before. So, scarcely knowing that she did it, Corinna drew the young girl—Krin they called her—closer and closer to her. When Corinna was not at her drawing and Krin was free from her settlement work, the two were always together, talking softly and unceasingly. They shared their thoughts and dreams as if the two had been of the same age. And the strong force of personality that was Corinna's drew and held the young girl till she wanted no other friend than her cousin, who was, by worldly measurements, a middle-aged woman.

"But she has never grown up," Krin explained tenderly once to a man, a poet and fantast, one of the people admitted to Corinna's inner circle. "She has a sort of heaven about her wherever she goes, and she always stays the same age, like the angels."

The man laughed, and tossed back his long hair.

"It is not heaven, child," he answered. "It is Fairyland. Corinna has been to Fairyland, and they are keeping her heart there for her, under a green mound. That is why she is eternally young."

What she has now is a heart of topaz or amber—a Fairyland heart."

Young Krin came over to Corinna, who was sitting and listening with her usual still, bright smile.

"Is that why nothing ever hurts you or upsets you; why you are always still and happy, no matter what goes on?" she asked, laying her arms on her cousin's lap and looking up at her with worshiping eyes.

"That is why," Corinna said, answering on the note of gentle fantasy that was a sort of language among her group. "Once long ago I met the Little People, and they said that I might make their pictures, but only if I would come into Fairyland and stay with them a while. And we liked each other so much that when I was sent back I left them my heart to keep. 'For half my heart's in Fairyland and half is here on earth!'"

"They all worship you—but I love you," whispered Krin.

"I love you, too, dear child," Corinna answered in her sweet, caressing voice. In her heart of hearts she was glad of Krin's love, almost humanly glad. She did not realize how much she liked to receive it. She only knew that she cared for the child very deeply, as if she had been her own daughter.

"Nothing but good can ever come of loving," she told herself that night, when she was conscious of a faint wonderment over the intensity of her feeling for Krin. "My dear little girl!"

She looked around the still, high-ceiled room, with its curious, dreamy pictures.

"There has never a throb of grief beaten against these walls," she thought, as she had so often thought, with a little thrill of pride in her own height above common suffering.

Indeed, the few who were allowed to cross the threshold of her inner room, and the many who entered her house, were wont to notice first of all the feeling of intense peace which wrapped the place Corinna lived in. Few of her guests were unsensitive. The densest of these felt the still atmosphere, distinct as a perfume, which surrounded her. To be with her was to drop all the pulsing of ambition and jealousy and love and hate that most human beings carry. And as her inner circle was made up almost entirely of people who did creative work, and as such people, working in the emotions, carry a heavy burden of feeling, their rest was as great in that shrine-like atmosphere as their tension had been in the outer world.

She wondered a little sometimes why it was that,

soothed and healed as she knew people to be by the quiet of her home and presence, still it was to her mother they brought their troubles for spoken help. To the mother, who had not a particularly impressive personality, who was merely a very kind and gentle elderly woman, people showed their hurt places nakedly. Her room was a confessional.

Once, coming into that room unexpectedly, believing it empty, Corinna had found her mother sitting in her accustomed chair, with a lad sobbing against her knees. He was a young singer who had lately been drawn into Corinna's circle, a boy whose sweetheart, it was whispered, had broken with him brutally. Corinna had looked, and slipped out again before she was seen. She had a strange, half-terrified feeling, as if she had come too near something dangerous and vibrating. It was so long since she had seen or heard of a naked sorrow. Yet her mother's face had bent over the lad's head, wise and comforting and unafraid.

"She does that all the time," Corinna had suddenly known. And she wondered the more about it.

For Corinna's mother had never learned Corinna's own secret of peace. Little things fretted her openly, other little things made her disproportion-

ately happy, as they had done ever since her daughter could remember. She did not dwell on any rarefied mountain-top of still joy, and if her maid or her milkman did not like her she was uneasy till she had won them—and had usually won the stories of their sorrows and joys into the bargain. Corinna smiled tenderly as she thought of her mother. She had never ceased, Corinna knew, wanting from her daughter the little stream of daily confidences, of tales of hurt feelings and hurt fingers which had been hers in her daughter's childhood. Corinna wondered dimly sometimes if the overflowing of her mother's sympathy to others were not partly because she wanted to be told of Corinna's hurts, and was not.

“Dear Mother!” Corinna would think, “I can only go on being happier and happier, until some day she will believe in my happiness.”

But even to the hour of her death Mrs. Goldthwaite never did believe it. Almost the last words she spoke to her daughter were words of comfort, as if she were a little girl who was unhappy.

Corinna kissed her mother when she was dead, and knelt by her for a little while. When she lifted her face again it was lighted like an angel's.

"Look at her!" the nurse whispered to Krin, standing by her and sobbing.

Corinna had taken this grief, too, up to the heights.

"You mustn't cry, little Krin," she whispered to her cousin. "See, I'm not crying. Wherever she is now she is close to us, and our love is close to her, just as if she were here still. We can love her so much—more. We can love her soul back to us close—close!"

Krin looked up, drying her eyes, and clung to Corinna.

"Cousin Corinna, you are like an angel! Oh, I will try to be like you. You're so close to God you can't suffer."

"Close to God—to love," Corinna murmured to her. "Love is everywhere. There's no time or space, just the love we give."

"But oh, I want her love too!" sobbed Krin, breaking down again. "Only last night she whispered to me about being careful not to lose sleep, because it would tire me, and I couldn't do my work . . . and she could scarcely talk. Only last night——"

"Hush, dear!" said her daughter again. "We must love her so much that we won't have time

to miss her love. And we will draw it to us, so."

The next day Corinna opened a drawer where she kept the few things Henry had given her, and laid other things in it: her mother's knitting needles, her gold-bowed spectacles, her religious books. It was a drawer she opened often and looked into smilingly, her heart lifted by love for them both.

Krin stayed on with her, except, as it had always been, in the summers. Then Corinna went away, traveling or resting in some old farmhouse, and Krin was with her father and mother.

The second summer, when Krin came back, Corinna thought she noticed a difference in the girl—a tremulousness and excitability, and swift alternations of mood. But these, if they had existed at all, faded away in the atmosphere of Corinna's own still radiance. The two women went on with their work, and held their little court. There were as many pilgrimages now to Corinna's house as there had been in her father's time.

Then, one still, winter afternoon, Corinna was called downstairs from her drawing to see some one, a Sydney Corning. She did not know the name, but then there were a great many people she gave

audience to whose names were strange to her. She came into the room where he was, and greeted him with her usual caressing stateliness, that gentleness and sweetness of a queen which was her habitual manner.

But, Sydney Corning, who was a handsome lad, scarcely responded. He answered her shortly.

“I’m a friend of your niece’s,” he volunteered when the greeting was over.

“My cousin,” corrected Corinna, smiling.

“Your cousin, then—it doesn’t matter. And—Miss Goldthwaite, I came to see if you could help me. Can’t I see you in some place where there won’t be any one else coming in?”

“Why, surely,” Corinna answered with her unfailing gentleness. “Come with me.”

She led him to the little sitting-room her mother had been used to occupy.

“Now I will help you in any way I can,” she said, smiling at him as he rose impatiently from his chair.

“I want you to send Krin Raymond away from you,” he said without preface. “They say you’re a saint and an angel and all that. Won’t you let her go?”

She looked at him in astonishment.

"I think you do not know. Miss Raymond stays with me because she prefers it."

"I know it," he burst out, "I know it—and you own her, body and soul. She adores you so much that she's getting as like you as she possibly can be. I didn't know, at first, whom she was getting like. I knew she wasn't my Krin any more. She did love me. She said so. But she came back the next summer, not a human girl any more. She's been somebody else ever since. I thought at first it was grief, but it wasn't, though it dated from the time Mrs. Goldthwaite died. She's happy enough now. But she's like a gracious, pleasant statue . . . She's like—you!"

Corinna looked at him in surprise.

"I'm sorry she does not love you," she said gently. "But it is a little strained to connect me with it."

"I came here very angry," he retorted impatiently, "and you're making me feel that I ought to be very grateful to you for letting me offer you homage. It isn't what you say, it's the atmosphere of you. But you have done it to Krin, and if you really don't know, at least you might let me tell you."

"Tell, then," said Corinna, still smiling a little.

He spoke more quietly.

"Corinna was all right, warm and human and natural, till after your mother died. She must have been one of the most wonderful people on earth, that mother of yours, to keep things alive and the rhythm of them going, against that thousand-candle-power feeling you give off. Why, just talking to you, I'm beginning to feel serene and walled-off and inhuman."

He caught his breath for a moment, then: "Krin's getting inhuman," he interrupted himself abruptly. "She's far off, like a priestess—like you. Oh, Corinna Goldthwaite, if you do love her, change her back—take your spell off her! One goddess in a house is enough. She'll be like you without the genius! Won't you help me? Your mother would have helped me!"

The rush of selfish, demanding love there, warm and throbbing in Corinna's still place of peace, frightened her, as that sobbing boy at her mother's knees had frightened her long ago.

"But what can I do, dear lad?" she asked, struggling for her usual voice.

"Oh, don't!" he broke out bitterly. "Krin said just that, in just that gentle, impersonally loving way. Stop her being like you, that's what you

can do! There are lots of women nobody wants that you can turn into geniuses. But leave my Krin human and alive. I want her to love me, and care whether I love her, not scatter denatured affection over the universe!"

Corinna did not answer. She found that she could not make her lips move.

The boy was frightened at his own daring in the hush that followed. He looked at Corinna Goldthwaite, sitting before him, erect and calm. She was so gentle and great and wonderful, and he had talked like this to her! He began to apologize brokenly. But Corinna held up one hand, with the gesture of gentle sovereignty that was habitual.

"I am sorry," she said at length in a low voice. "I did not realize that I was doing wrong. Will you forgive me? I—I love Krin too. She shall not be turned to stone"

Her voice broke a little, and she rose and left the boy, still stammering his terrified apologies. To his increasing sense of *lese majeste* was added a feeling that he had attacked Corinna for a chimera, an intangibility. There was nothing real—he had been fighting air.

But the words had pierced through. Corinna

stood in the middle of her own locked room, and searched her heart to find how much of this terrific thing was true. She, with her twenty years of God-given, still happiness, of years of holding court, of giving peace and surcease royally to the too-intense people who sought her—she had turned Krin to stone!

She waited the rest of the afternoon and evening for Krin to come in. The girl was superintending a pageant that day at her settlement, and Corinna knew that she would not be back until late in the evening. Indeed, it was past twelve before Krin returned, and through the long hours Corinna's courage faded. When finally her cousin tiptoed up the stairs, Corinna could only come and stand mutely in her lighted doorway.

“It was lovely!” Krin spoke, smiling at her. “And all the children did so well, and I loved them so. They sang like dear little rough angels.”

“And—do you think they loved you?” Corinna asked, her throat dry.

Krin laughed sweetly.

“I never thought, any more than you do, cousin Corinna! *I love them!*”

“Just a minute, dearest!” Corinna essayed again. “There was a man here today—Sydney Corning.”

Krin smiled again, that sweet, unmoved smile.

"He's been confiding in you, poor boy! I am sorry I let him care, that summer. It's seemed so different, since. I—I don't want to love anybody, that way. It's . . . too alive . . . too close and frightening—feverish! I don't think I'll ever marry, dear. I'm happy here with you—wonderful you!"

Corinna did not answer. The girl went singing softly down the hall to her own room. She was in her pageant dress still, a long clinging Greek gown of green, with a little wreath of green leaves on her streaming, fair hair. Her even walk and trailing gown and uplifted fair head gave her a look of some one unearthly, a fairy lady. And a word some one had said of herself once rushed back on Corinna—

"Her heart is in Fairyland, under a green mound."

Was Krin's heart there, too, young, vivid Krin's? Had she, with her silently dominant influence, her perfect and saintly example, shut Krin out from wifehood and motherhood? What could she do—what should she do? Even as she asked herself she knew. No words or implorations would avail. It had not been words or implorations that had made

Krin like herself. She must go back in spirit twenty years, back to that hill where she had forced suffering out of her heart.

Up there in the little passionless room, where her own sexless, gently-fantastic fairy people watched her with their curious smiles, Corinna knelt down at the couch where her mother had died, and prayed again. In an interval of her praying she lifted her face, and saw the only portrait in the room, her mother's head. She had done it herself, in curious, radiant colors. It was a glorified likeness. But Corinna had known its lines too well to be able to leave out its kind earthliness of expression, the human, anxious mother-look she had been wont to see bent on herself so often.

When some little everyday mischance had come to Corinna, something that would have been a thing for the mother's sympathy in most households, Corinna could remember that expression on her mother's face, baffled, anxious—her mother, cut off from giving pity or consolation! Corinna remembered, now, hurt after little hurt that she had set away from herself sublimely. Had her mother felt them all, borne them all for her, as she herself was bearing now for Krin? Only it must have been more, much more, for she was not Krin's real

mother. The picture, with its mocking fairy-tale colorings, watched her unrelentingly, its mother-eyes unrested still, still perplexed.

Corinna rose slowly, and went to the drawer where her memory-things lay. There was the pair of yellowing white gloves Henry had given her, a bunch of ferns he had gathered for her one day, some music. And by them her mother's knitting needles and spectacles, and some books. Corinna lifted one, a book of religious poetry, called "*The Changed Cross*." Her mother had read that last.

She had been used to look tenderly at the things, smiling with the thought of her love for them both. Now she lifted them out, slowly, the unaccustomed tears raining down her face. She laid them on the couch where she had been kneeling, the little futile things which represented the two great loves and bereavements of her life. They were both gone from her now, Henry as much as her mother, for the prosperous, obvious-minded business man Belle had built out of the impetuous young Henry Raymond was not even the shadow of Corinna's lover.

But the old love for that dead young lover, and the sorrow of that love; Corinna knew now that

they were in her heart still, and that they always had been, shut down deep by the work of her own will.

She had—she made herself face the stabbing truth,—in her young dread of pain and self-contempt, deadened her hunger for Henry's love as any very strong-willed person can deaden any desire, by killing a part of herself with it. She had thought her change a sublimation—it had only been a drugging. She had deliberately avoided her share of the human heritage, her share of suffering and hurt. She had not been in heaven. She had been in Fairyland, where hearts are spellbound and eyes incapable of tears, not heaven, where—she could remember her mother's voice reading it—“God hath wiped away all tears from their eyes.” And the old grief of her lost lover, the newer grief of her dead mother, pressed heavier and heavier, till it seemed as if her spirit would shriek and break with the accumulated weight of all the sorrows.

But in the midst of the intolerable hurt that so crushed her down as to make her physically sick and faint, she caught her breath, and her tears checked.

“Why, I am like them now!” she remembered, “those poor hurt human people who came to mother to be comforted. I am their sister now—

*'Sister to the mountains now
And sister to the day and night,
Sister to God . . . '*

I am human. I am not in Fairyland any more, I am close to my own kind. Oh, mother, if you only were here to comfort me! I would be so glad now —so glad . . . ”

The kind, earthly face on the wall never changed its look of denied perplexity, of longing to give a love and comfort never asked of it. The weight of sorrow bore down drenchingly on Corinna. But she knelt steadfastly on, holding the hurt to her, her appointed portion. And with it came, touching her almost as if it had been her mother's hand, the blessed sense of oneness with all the world.

She belonged to people again, to the world's rhythm of pleasing and being pleased, grieving and being grieved, of giving and receiving. She was humanity's sister. The Fairyland heart was gone.

GOOD TIMES

IN the prospectuses and notices and advertisements that you get from us of the Park about May, when resort-lust strikes you and we are trying to steer it in our direction, you always find, along with the water and the air and the golf-links, a tender-noted, sincerely affirmed paragraph about our board-walk.

We mean what we say about it, we who live here in the Park through the eight long village months you don't see, as well as the four glitter-months you do see. We love it ourselves. It is not so very long, nothing like so long as the Atlantic City one. But it is smooth and very wide and un-built on, and garlanded with lights and jeweled with light-traced casinos. From the sea it looks like a necklace of yellow diamonds, with the pier and casinos for flashing pendants. It is the first place you go after you have seen the hotel clerk about your trunk and found out where your room is and had your dinner. Other people from the hotel are going there, too; the minister and his wife from your home town, the little New York stenographer, plump and blonde

and uncorseted under her orange charmeuse; the oculist and his wife from Leonia, with their three graded daughters; the handsome young Rahway man, who turns out afterward to have been a barber, and the two girls you haven't placed yet. And presently, because it is the Park, and because it is summer and you are on a holiday, and because your conventions are as pleasantly relaxed in this tingling salt air as are your muscles and mind, you all link arms in a jovial row and march dancingly down the boardwalk in a crooked, giggling line. And then some bold spirit starts a fascinating rag-time thing that you scolded your small son for wasting a dime on last week, and everybody that can sings it. And everybody is very innocently happy. You continue to be innocently happy, with a few intervals when it rains, as long as you stay down.

Now there is no reason on earth why you and the minister and the stenographer and the oculist and the barber should not foregather in the Park on a gay equality, and sing "Melinda's Wedding Day" down the jeweled boardwalk. There is no reason why you should not lie all over the sand in the mornings clad in your short-cut bathing suits, taking snap-shot groups of yourselves in piles. We

like you to, indeed, because it shows that you are cheerful and contented, and contented people continue to stay at the scene of their joys, and spend money that pays the interest on the notes. You would not think of being friendly with the little ribboned stenographer with her good-hearted disregard of grammar and the finer feelings, at home. Neither would the minister be photographed at home with his bathing-suited limbs held to the four corners of the compass by four convulsed young women, also in bathing suits. And, presumably, the barber has not the opportunity of teaching so many well-bred girls the one-step back in Rahway where his trade is an open secret.

So it really doesn't matter as far as any of you are concerned, you who come down here through the four glitter-months to let us earn our living. You go back home, when your weeks are up, feeling fine. You have a fearful coat of tan, and much less money than you expected. That's all. As for your mind and your muscles and your conventions, most especially your conventions, they tighten with an automatic, painless jerk before your suitcase is lifted down from its rack overhead.

It is different with the year-round people, who have no other homes to go to. They stay in a sum-

mer-resort all winter, a Cinderella of a summer-resort that has pulled off her electric jewels and packed away her summer braveries, and merely waits around till Prince Summer-Crowd shall come again. It is very hard on the summer-excited, summer-spoiled resident children. Nobody has thought to explain to them about the conventions that tighten up at the end of the train ride. At least, nobody has been able to put it so they believe it. And that is the whole trouble, and what this story is about.

Nobody had even tried to explain to Dollie Valentine. Dollie was not exactly a Park girl, but she might as well have been for all the time she spent at home. She lived in Radnor Beach, a little next-door place to the Park, the whole year round. The unformulated idea at the back of her goldy-brown head was that everybody interesting behaved summer fashion always. Because it's very hard to realize what you don't see. Of course, there were many virtuous, carefully-behaved people in the Park, people who kept Sundays village fashion, and also kept their girls off the boardwalk. But they were usually uninteresting people whom nobody young could ever think of wanting to be like. Their girls generally grew up shy and dowdy and a little

secretly resentful, and either took to books or good works, as people different from their world must. So they never counted at all.

Dollie's father was Valentine, of Valentine and Jenkins, contractors and builders. He had started out as a carpenter, and made a good deal of money. There is nothing much over at Radnor Beach but contractors, except plumbers. They are all well off, because summer resorts have to be kept perfectly contracted and built and plumbed. So Dollie had all the clothes she wanted, and spending money, and there was a pianola and a bull-pup. They had no maid, because Mrs. Valentine said that she wouldn't stand for no colored wenches stealing the very clothes offen your back. But she did all the work, because it was too much trouble to get Dollie to help her. She had all the labor-saving devices. Dollie, considering all things, had a pretty easy life. But when you are sixteen, and pretty, and full of vim to your strong little brown finger-ends, an easy life which includes pretty frocks and nowhere to wear them, a pianola with nobody special to play for, and a bull-pup with nobody special to admire him, you feel almost as sad as if you had no bull-pup or pianola or frocks at all. Especially when you know that just across the lake from you

all the people are having as much fun as they want all the time.

Like most girls who grow up outdoors in sea air, Dollie was physically a slim young goddess. And all the shore girls learn a ready courtesy, because the Park has company and wears company manners all summer. Some of them learn good English, too. Dollie had. Except that her ways were a little more assured, a little more challenging, you could not have told her from the young girls at the Santa Barbara, where every one paid six dollars a day, and there was hot salt water in all the rooms. Partly the money her father had made for her, and partly the standards of the summer people, had put her beyond her father and mother, and even her brothers, finely-built, slovenly, cheerful loafers that they were. It had put her beyond the other girls' brothers, too; particularly Tommy.

Tommy's other name was Brock. He and Dollie had "gone with" each other, after the precocious Park fashion, since Dollie was eight and Tommy eleven. Tommy was big and cheerful and untidy, with tragic blue black-lashed eyes and a great many all-gold teeth. His nails were black-edged also, and he slouched and usually wore a red sweater. He

plumbed a little, fitfully, but it is hard to work when the whole place is a playground. You mostly found him propping up a post in the overhung esplanade we call Knockers' Row, or lying along the sand in a small amount of bathing suit. He was a good-tempered, easy-going boy enough, but he looked about as much in the same class with Dollie as a coal barge with a private yacht. Still, they had kept on going with each other in the winters. They had to; there is no other kind of boy among the prosperous artisan Radnor Beach population. In the summer they drifted apart, of course. As the residents say, you never see anybody you know in the summer.

It was late June and the bathing was beginning to be good. Dollie had run along the sand about three-quarters of a mile to get to Whitefield Avenue where most of the people go in. Tommy was there before her, leaning against the high carpenter's horse thing the life guards sit on, watching amiably for a pretty summer girl to flirt with a little. He grinned at Dollie in friendly fashion, as she flashed across the sand with a couple of the other girls.

Dollie dashed into the waves and swam strongly out from shore. It was so lovely to get out alone in the clear green water, out beyond the bathers,

and where nobody had dirty nails or used crooked English, or let smells of cooking get all over the house. While Dollie faced seaward all she could see was clean, glimmering jade-colored water and clean blue sky. She loved beauty, poor Dollie Valentine, beauty and fitness and dainty ways. And above all she wanted happiness, the good times that are flaunted so before you at a summer resort. And she was sixteen, the age when it most seems to you as if youth was so short, so terribly short, and all the good times life owed you had to be crowded into now—right now! And the boardwalk, with its careless, singing people who had stopped being staid for their two or four or eight weeks, was there to tell her that there *was* happiness, lots of it, and there were good times, luxurious, auto, ballroom good times, if only she could manage to reach her hand out a little farther and get them!

She slid over on her back in the water and laughed a little at the splash. Then she began to sing softly to herself. Who wouldn't, after all, young and strong and pretty, and lying out in jade-colored water on a June morning!

A hand caught hers, and she saw a boy's face smiling at her as she sang. He had taken her singing as an invitation to make friends.

"You certainly can swim," he said. It was a gentleman's voice, soft-noted and clear-cut, the sort of voice some of the expensive schools can teach. Dollie looked and heard, and smiled back and splashed him a little.

Now, before we go any farther, it is only fair to the boy, whose name was Herbert Grant, to explain that he was not a villain nor a seducer, nor a dark and cruel-minded person at all. He was merely a lad of twenty whose father had always given him more money to play with than he could possibly need, and forgotten to give him standards to use it by. Or to live by, indeed, except the general rules of being kind-hearted and polite and keeping his outside clean. These are not bad standards, but they aren't enough to go around. For the rest, he was slim and gay and gentle-mannered, a boy you liked instinctively. He was bored to death, in his young desire for good times, by the sedately-superior Santa Barbara and summer girls who couldn't swim, and desired to be jumped over breakers. He was also the sort of boy Dollie wanted most to like. She looked at the brown hand that showed its mancuring even through the water, and liked it and the swift, soft voice. And all the girls "picked up." And when you are sixteen you are certain as never

before and never after that there may not be enough good times to last the old year out. And all this explains why Dollie smiled and answered.

“Some swimmer yourself,” she said, showing all her pretty teeth, and dashing water over him with both hands. She had to twist round to do it, and catch at him to regain her balance, and they both laughed, blue eyes into brown.

“Race you over to the pier,” said the boy. “Can you swim that far?”

“Sure I can,” said Dollie scornfully, like a small boy who has been dared. She gave him one parting splash, and was off crawl-fashion. He followed as swiftly. They reached the pier together, and clung to the posts, watching each other in admiration.

“Let’s go up on the beach and talk,” suggested the boy presently, and they swam back and flung themselves on the sand together. “Gee, but you’re pretty,” he said bluntly, running his hand down her arm as they lay side by side.

The touch was no new thing to Dollie. She was a boardwalk girl, and they make light-hearted love all summer, as the custom of summer resorts is. The Park is a sort of middle-class Arcadia, you know, with a brass band instead of flute and tabor. She was used to “fussing.”

But if the hand that caressed Dollie's arm was wonted, the soft voice was not, nor the well-groomed look of the boy even in his bathing suit. Before this Dollie hadn't been exactly grown-up, and had gone mostly with Radnor Beach boys even in summer. She turned her pretty child-face, under its rose-satin head drapery, toward his that was almost as pretty and young, and smiled like a little girl.

"Am I—really?" she asked half shyly, half coquettishly.

"Indeed you *are*," said the boy fervently. He was young, he had been bored, and here was as pretty a girl as the beach afforded ready to help him have good times! "You're the prettiest, liveliest girl I've seen since I came down here, and that's three weeks!"

In another moment, still holding her slim, brown arm, he was pouring out the story of his weariness at the Santa Barbara, the lonely weeks he had put in, and his delight at finding such a nice girl as she was. It was really a playmate that he was so glad of finding.

Dollie listened hungrily. What he was saying seemed the most interesting and important thing that ever was. She answered him briefly and gaily,

with a real interest that lighted her lips and cheeks and hurried Herbert on. She tried to hide her awe at the setting of what he said, the money, the motor-cars, all the soft-cushioned comfort of which the boy himself was a little proudly conscious still.

Dollie liked him very much, and he liked her. So before they parted to dress they had made an appointment to meet on the boardwalk that night. Herbert wanted to come to her house after her, but Dollie would not let him. It was too far off, she said. What she thought was that she did not want him to see the plush things in the parlor, nor her cheerfully-sloppy mother. They did not fit, she knew, with her own grace and daintiness, and she did want Herbert to think the very best possible of her.

So that night Dollie and Herbert met on the boardwalk and sat out together on the fishing pier, as far as they could from the intrusive arc-light. In a little while Dollie's head dropped to Herbert's shoulder, and his arm locked round her close and comforting. She could smell the faint, fresh odor of cigarettes and violet water that was shaken from his coat. She remembered Tommy's sweater and shivered a little, and buried her goldy-brown head deeper on Herbert's shoulder. She had been used

to arms around her ever since she could remember. Love-making is the principal occupation in the Park, you know, as in Arcadia. The visiting girls do it while they are down. It doesn't matter, they say—they'll never see the man again. And most of the pretty, empty-lived Radnor Beach girls do it all summer and all winter. Which is natural enough, when you come to think of it. The oculist's youngest daughter from Leonia was sitting three benches off. Her head was on a man's shoulder, too, a man she had picked up on the beach the day before. But *she* went home in two weeks, with a harmless little love affair to remember, a delightful, clandestine feeling of adventure and having had something happen. Dollie, you see, had no somewhere else to go.

The next night there was an auto ride. It seemed he really had a machine of his own. Dollie had not quite believed him till he appeared in it. They took one of Dollie's girl friends and a boy Herbert knew, and went up to Marty's. There was a very expensive dinner with bottles of champagne, and just one little cocktail apiece for the girls, because they wanted them, and a long ride afterward in the moonlight. The girls were set down at a corner near their homes at about two, and went home very

happy and excited. Dollie's mother scolded a little next day, but not much. You can't do a thing with the children in the summer time! That is the motto with which Radnor Beach mothers dismiss many things.

Herbert was down for the summer. He did not mind, now he had found Dollie. He was very much in love with her. You would have been in love with her that summer, too; she was so pretty and so young, and so gay and so loving. All the nice girls Herbert had known so far had not known very well how to keep up their end of love-making, and he had been a little shy of them, a little afraid they were too good. But Dollie was as young and decorative and pretty-mannered and gentle as any of them, and the careless life she had always led, of light-hearted love-making with any friendly lad she knew, had smashed all the troublesome barriers boys of twenty find so annoying.

"Have as good a time as you can," say the little boardwalk girls. "There isn't much else to do, and it's slow enough in the winter, goodness knows!"

Herbert's friend went home in a couple of weeks, and Ola, Dollie's friend, faded away into the distance with another boy. Chums are a nuisance anyway, when you're in love. After that the two went

their way alone. They spent their mornings on the beach, their afternoons on the lake or ocean, and they danced at all the tango places within a radius of twenty miles in the evenings, always alone, always together. There never will be anything prettier than Dollie, dancing the wild new dances in her vivid satin frocks, held tight in Herbert's arms. There is something about two young people very much in love, a gladness and lightness of heart that is blown out to you like a perfume. That is what people mean by "all the world loves a lover."

Neither of them thought much about what was going to happen next; they were enjoying themselves too much right now. Dollie had reached out her hands and caught the good times that had been flying, like butterflies, just beyond her for so long. She was having as good a time as other girls in the Park, no matter how happy or how rich they were.

One night, fortunately for their appetites a few yards from a roadhouse, the car broke down. Herbert laughed a little and swore a little, but it was too late to do anything till morning, and anyway they were both starved. They laughed over it, and went to the roadhouse and ordered a long, drink-dotted meal. It was three before they had finished, wine-thrilled, young, very much in love. And it

was late next morning when Dollie got home. Her mother took it for granted that she had been with Ola, and there was nothing much said. Mothers always scold a little—you have to expect that. After that there were other times “with Ola”—it is so easy to do things when you’re young and pretty and in love, and all the world is one careless, kissing Arcadia. Nobody bothers with you much in the Park in the summer. They are too busy having good times themselves.

So things went on in a world that was all sunshine and green water and dancing and laughter, till September came, and Herbert’s people began to think about going home. Of course, when they went, Herbert had to go, too.

He couldn’t very well tell his people about Dollie just then—Dollie saw that, didn’t she? Though if she really wanted him to he would tell them everything, every single thing—even if it did mean everything being smashed up for him.

And Dollie, sobbing very pitifully, said that he mustn’t tell them till he found a good time for it. Herbert said he was sure the best time would come, very, very soon, and he would come back at the latest before Christmas, and marry her. They even planned out their honeymoon. They clung to each

other passionately, and Herbert was nearer to crying himself than a man likes to get at twenty. They parted, feeling that there was nothing in life worth while but getting back to each other. Meanwhile there would be the consolation—not much, but still a consolation—of daily letters.

Herbert did not come back when Dollie thought he would. She set it over the farthest edge of probability, the beginning of November, so she would be surprised when he came long before that. He wrote, but not as often as he had said. His letters were conscientiously fervent, but they grew farther and farther apart. And he did not come in November. Then Christmas came. But Herbert did not come. And he sent nothing—not even a letter, not even a card.

The day after New Year Dollie finally gave up hope. She locked herself in her little shiny-varnished, red-rose-papered room, and clutched a post-card picture of Herbert in a pasteboard aeroplane, and cried till there was a great wet spot in the rose-patterned spread that she had made to nearly match the wallpaper. She cried as she had never known anybody could cry—till there was no cry left in her; till she had reached that dreadful other side of tears where everything is gray and sane and feels like

death. When she had come to this, she rose from the bed and went over to sit and think by the window. From where she stared she could see the ocean, with its empty boardwalk and its little gray-brown waves slapping tiredly against the shore. Even the sea stops showing off when the summer people go. The boardwalk itself was empty and dismantled looking, with all its strings of colored lights put away against next June. It is not a good place to see when you are considering what to do with a spoiled child-life, because it is so dreary an allegory of forsakenness itself.

She felt hopelessly little and wrecked and alone. She sat limply in her rocker and stared down the long empty boardwalk, and suffered dully. Her eyes focused, at length, on a far gleam of red. Tommy, or some other boy like him; some boy she had learned better than to be content with. And the empty boardwalk. Yet that was the best there could be for her now, if she could dare have even that, spoiled, degraded little summer toy that she was! And Herbert was happy somewhere, gay and loved and untouched, forgetting all his promises and his love—and what he had made of her! And she loved him so! She loved him even yet, as only strong, passionate young sixteen can love. It was

he who had made her this—so gentle and kind and wonderful a playmate as he had always been. She could scarcely piece together the dear boy lover who had always been so chivalrous and wonderful, and this boy who had done a cruel thing to her and forgotten her. Yet they were both Herbert. Because of Herbert there were no good times for her anywhere any more. *Were* there? Dollie's rounded childish face, innocent still, as it had always been ignorant, hardened suddenly into a middle-aged woman's. Now she was *this*, and her Herbert, still prosperous and beloved and triumphant, was going on with his good times without her. It didn't matter what *this* did.

Finally she got up and went over to the mirror and powdered her face carefully, rouging it till it was a fair counterfeit of the old childish bloom. It was a half-mechanical process. She had never needed to do much rouging before. After she had made herself look like herself—only it was an artificial girl instead of a real one—she sat on for hours, staring through her image in the glass, scarcely thinking. There didn't seem to be anything to do but go on sitting there forever—forever—till she died.

“Dollie!” called her mother sharply up the

stairs. "Here's one of the girls wants you to go down on the boardwalk. Want to go?"

She rose, still mechanically, and went down the stairs. The boardwalk—always the boardwalk! If you lived anywhere near it it owned you, whether for good or bad. The boardwalk was there, stripped, desolate, with the winds blowing across it. But there were still boys on it. There was Tommy Brock. It didn't matter to him much, she knew that, whether she had done what she'd done or not. The Radnor Beach boys more or less expected the girls to be that sort. There was nothing left for her of all the things she had wanted—the things she belonged with. She thought, shudderingly, of Tommy's black nails, of his good-natured vulgarities. . . . But there were other boys—perhaps boys as pleasant—oh, no, no—there couldn't be! But still . . . Tommy would do to go with till next summer. And perhaps next summer—

"I'll show him I don't care!" thought Dollie, forlornly defiant. She looked in the glass again, seemingly this time. She was almost what she had been before.

"Kisses don't leave any mark," she remembered hearing people saying. Having your heart broken—being a bad girl instead of a good one—hadn't

left any mark, either. Might as well go on having good times. Other men—and if it came to marrying Tommy, in time—well, that was a long way off.

Her poor little face hardened. It had been such an innocent face!

“Tell ‘em I’m coming, Mother!” she called down, and leaned forward for one more look in the glass.

“You gotta have good times!” she said to herself over and over, under her breath, and ran down the stairs.

OH, MR. DREAM-MAN

CELIA's tray had been carried down. Celia herself, up on her sleeping-porch, felt like going to sleep for the night, she said; but the phonograph wouldn't disturb her. So Ruth tiptoed across the floor of the bungalow and put on a soft needle. She sank into one of the low chairs that stood on either side of the hearth, and, all alone in the twilight, crossed her hands and prepared to listen to the record.

It was one of the oldest she had, and it was scratchy in some places and blurred in others. But Ruth's sober face, as she listened, softened to a girlish, dreamy content, and her great wistful gray eyes lighted tenderly. It was just a foolish old rag-time thing with cheap words and wistful unexpected rhythms, sung by two negro voices that were rich even through the medium of the scratched disk.

*“Oh, Mr. Dream-man, please let me dream some
mo’,
Just lak the dream ah had the night befo’”*

sang the woman's voice in the refrain.

*"Ah dreamt about a lovin' man, he was so sweet,
When ah start to think of him ma heart begins
to beat . . ."*

The words blurred here; it had been an old record when Ruth got it. She did not mind. She knew how the end would be; the same words over again.

*"Oh, Mr. Dream-man . . . please let me dream
some mo'!"*

She sat still long after the record was finished. Her face was still lighted and her lips moved occasionally. You would have thought, to see her, that the old record was one some lover of hers had sung, or perhaps been very fond of. But Ruth Allaire had never had a lover.

It had not been that she was ugly, or repellent. She had simply never happened to have the time or the chance. When you're very shy and very busy and only ordinarily pretty, men don't necessarily take the trouble to love you. Ever since Ruth's tenth year she had worked hard and desperately. Her mother had worked, too, till she died, and so, later, had pretty, delicate Celia, the seven-years-younger sister. Ruth's health had been rugged enough to stand, by a narrow margin, day-work and

night-school study, but the pleasures—well, they had never seemed to come close enough to touch, somehow. And now they never would, because she was thirty-one—and then, there was Celia.

Celia had worked, too. But she had played as well, and her health had not stood the double strain of office-work and good times. So it was a wonderful, a providential thing that a year before, when the doctors had begun to talk cheerfully about open-air cures, Ruth had attained to the height of being a certified expert accountant. This meant that she did not have to keep books in an office any more. She went and came very much as she pleased, and told banks whether their accounts were correct, which is a very exceptional position for a woman of thirty-one. Half her work could be done at home. So she was able to buy the little bungalow, ten miles out of the Park where the pines were thick, with its sleeping-porch on the second story for Celia; and there the two of them lived with the collie, far off from the world. Ruth went down to the city alternate weeks. It was rather a long pull, but she managed it. When she was away, old Mrs. Cooley-down-the-road did for Celia.

Celia fretted a little, but on the whole she was

fairly sweet about it, though there was a lover waiting till she should get well.

"Of course, it's all right for you, Ruthie," she would say when she was loneliest, "you never did care for men or good times or anything but getting ahead. But—oh, dear! to lose a whole year out of your life because of one foolish old lung, with everything just *chasing* by down in the city!"

"I know, dear," Ruth would say, "but just be patient a little longer." And Celia, easily comforted, would happily reread Harry's last letter.

Celia was only making the mistake that the rest of the world did; that because Ruth did not ask for things she did not want them. As a matter of fact, for the first three months in the lonely bungalow, with only kindly, busy Dr. Atchison going in and out, Ruth had been nearly wild with loneliness and nerve-strain, and the dreadful feeling that there would never be anything in life for her but hurried, careful drudgery. But this was all over now, and Ruth was nearly as contented as her sister thought she ought to be. She had built herself the dream-man.

It was absolutely ridiculous, a performance a mathematician thirty-one years old had no excuse for. But when you have been the lifter, not the

leaner, all your hard life, and finally face the fact that youth, with all its gold maybes, is gone; especially if you are worn by overwork and overworry and are only a tired woman after all, why—you have to do something, or break. Perhaps the real trouble was that Ruth was a born wife. It is almost impossible to expend one's womanly affections on rows of figures in ledgers.

It started one night, with the playing of the little disk. Ruth had bought a second-hand phonograph to amuse Celia. Celia didn't like it much, after all; it was too vivid a reminder of unattainable dances. But to pleasure-starved Ruth it became a joy. And on a night she happened to play "Mr. Dream-man." She was all alone downstairs, as usual. She heard it through, lying back in her chair. She sprang up at the end of it, staring ahead. She had been wild with nervous depression all day.

"Why shouldn't I have a dream-man?" she demanded aloud. "Why shouldn't I pretend to myself the kind of a lover I'd like to have had? It won't hurt anybody. And nobody—" she laughed a little bitterly—"nobody'd suspect me of being so silly!"

And so, out of mists and wishes and story-books

and wistful imaginings, but principally out of the little old scratched ragtime disk, Ruth's dream-man was made.

She always arranged the room carefully before she summoned him. Then she would put on the record and fold her hands and wait his coming.

At first he was rather a shadowy idea, but he gradually became real enough for Ruth to have drawn a picture of him and written out his life history. She had made him come in always about the time the song had reached its second line. First his step without, a quick, decided footfall; then the door flung open.

"For, of course," said Ruth to herself, "he is the master of the house."

And then—

"Well, little girl!" she would dream his voice, as she sat motionless in the firelit dusk. "Have you wanted me?"

There would be a fresh breath of outdoors about him, as if he had come from a long walk up through the pines.

"Oh, yes!" Ruth would whisper. "You don't know *how* I have missed you!"

And then—but she did not dare this till the

dream-man had come several times—then she sprang up to greet him with her arms out, and they kissed each other.

(Ruth flushed, even this latest evening, when she came to this part. But surely he would kiss her, if she was his little girl that he loved and took care of!)

Then she would fuss about him lovingly. But he never let her do much waiting on him.

“You have looked after other people all your life,” was one of the comforting things he would say. “Now, it’s your turn to be looked after, honey.”

(She reached one hand across to shut off the phonograph, ended. *“Please let me dream some more!”* But her dream would go on.)

He dressed in a trim khaki, outdoors fashion. His work kept him outdoors, she knew, though for some time she did not know exactly what it was. She did know that he was deeply browned by the sun, so deeply that his eyes looked sapphire-blue by contrast. His hair was curly, just a little, and thick, and sunburned till there were gilt streaks through its light-brown.

Tonight he flung himself down, half-kneeling, on the hearth-rug between Ruth and the collie. She

could nearly touch his gilt-streaked hair in the fire-light.

"You are so pretty, my little girl," he said.
"And I love you more every day. . . . How long
have we been engaged, dear?"

Ruth's eyes looked contentedly into the dusk.

"Three months," she said. "Oh, I was so lonely
before you came!"

He stroked her hand.

"But you are not lonely now, my dear," he said.
"You will never be lonely again."

"I know that!" she said. "Oh, I am so glad
there is you!"

Then silence fell for a while. That was one of
the most comforting things about the dream-man.
You could be as quiet as you liked or talk as
much as you liked, and he loved you just the
same. . . .

What was at first merely a fantastic, pleasant
daydream became very nearly a passionate reality
to lonely Ruth in her solitude of crowded city or
isolated woods. The day she found herself buying
a set of Conrad because he was a man's author, and
she wanted to talk about him with the dream-man,

she laughed at herself. She smiled at herself, too, faintly, for getting some simple little evening frocks—she had never had any before—because the dream-man thought her neck and arms were pretty. But the time when she got herself the little gold lovers'-knot ring, she could not laugh at herself. She found her eyes filling with tears.

Her lips and cheeks brightened, and the men in the banks where she worked, who had seen her pass so long, an efficient machine, began to be conscious of the feel of femininity about her, for she was looking after her appearance more than she ever had in all her hurried-up life before.

“Miss Allaire’s got a sweetheart,” the younger of them decided.

“You have such lovely hair!” he had whispered the night she did it the new way the first time. Indeed, she had so much of it that she had always merely plaited it tight and wound it out of the way. “I like my little girl to be pretty!”

That was the time he told her the long story about himself. He half-sat, half-lay in the old place she loved, on the rug between her and the collie. While he held her hand in both his long, brown capable ones, he told her all about his boyhood.

“I had a hard time, too, dear,” he said.

"Worked my way straight through college and technical school."

"And you had some one to support, too," Ruth answered in that fancied intercourse.

"Yes," he said. "I had my mother. . . ."

"And what books do you like best?" she asked inconsequently. But it was hard for her to imagine the answer, because she knew so little about men. The next time she went to the city she bought the Conrad and subscribed to a sporting magazine and an engineering monthly. She could not expect him to talk all the time about the woman things that were all she knew! After that she came to imagine quite interesting conversations with him about sport and engineering. If there had been a real man, they might have made him laugh; but a dream-man has to follow very much the lines of conversation you lay down for him. Though Ruth got to the point where she had to make scarcely any conscious effort as regards his end of the talking. It came, it seemed, almost of itself. How did he come to have been here, in the pines, to have found her?

"I love pinewoods, Ruthie, even little ones. You remember the day when I came to the door first? There was a fearful snowstorm——"

"And I let you in out of the snow——" Ruth whispered.

"And I knew that you were the one girl there was for me."

"We both knew," Ruth said half-aloud.

Her voice broke the spell. The dog sprang up with a sleepy bark, a log crashed through, and Ruth came back to the reality of the fire and the loneliness and the little scratched record at rest on the sewing-table. The dream was over for the night. She went slowly to bed.

But as she fell asleep there was a drowsy, sweet content wrapping her round, and she imagined that she could hear quick steps lessening in the distance.

From being only an evocation of the disk, Ruth's dream-man came to accompany her every thought and step all the day long. She held long talks with him as she went about her daily work in the house. He kept step invisibly with her in the city streets. Celia scarcely ever came downstairs, Mrs. Cooley-down-the-road did not seem to be given to curiosity. There was no one to disturb Ruth at her lonely, happy play.

So gradually she made the den off the living-room into a room for her dream-man. There she kept his books and his case of instruments for mechanical

drawing, his magazines, his sofa-pillows; there was his chiffonier, with the silver frame on it for his mother's picture. There was his banjo that he told her he had taught himself to play on. There in the closet—so far did the fantastic play take her—hung his white flannels. The drawers of the chiffonier, even, grew to be full. Ruth, entering the room, could evoke him at will. But the strongest reality of him was still by the living-room fire, on the rug at her feet or leaning eagerly forward in his chair, talking to her tenderly, or brightly, through the long lonely evenings.

Presently the fairy-story she was telling herself became too real for the comfort of Ruth's expert-accountant side. It came to a point where she could almost see his shape coming through the door at half-dusk—nearly hear his footsteps. The touch of his arms around her, his lips on hers, came to be as real a feeling as the tangibilities of her everyday life.

"I must not—oh, I must not!" she said to herself, catching her breath. "It is heavenly—but I may go crazy if I keep this up much longer!"

Yet she could not bear to give up entirely the dream-man who was her only happiness. She would only summon him, she decided, when she was *very*

lonely. And one shouldn't be *very* lonely with work to do and a sister to love and a perfectly good collie and an adequate income. . . .

Ruth cried stormily all the night she came to the decision, as if she had sent away a real lover. She locked the door of his room next day, sobbing as she did it. She was too tired to be self-controlled, she reminded herself. The strain of the housework and nursing and the long journeys might be making her want to cry if there had never been any dream-man at all—and a sharp little pain went flying through her heart as she put back the key on her ring, a physical pain as sharp as the mental one. But Ruth was firm with herself.

“Not unless I am *very* lonely,” she said.

For two months she held to her resolution. She suffered quite as much as if she had given up a real lover.

Finally, one unseasonably bitter night in November, when the work for Celia and her own work had both been cruelly heavy, she broke down.

“Just one more night with my dream-man!” she pleaded to the common-sense self. “Oh, I must have him just once more—I must! . . . If I can’t think some one is sorry for me and loves me I shall die!”

She fled up to her room, softly, for fear of wakening Celia. She put on deliberately her prettiest frock, a pale blue satin with a sash of deep rose—a frock she had bought for her dream—and with slippers and stockings to match. She fastened a necklace round her throat and bracelets on her arms. She waved her hair carefully and heaped it high. She was thinner and paler, she could see in the glass, than she had been—the two lonely months had told on her. She touched her cheeks with nail-rouge till they were faintly pink again. Then she walked slowly downstairs, still fighting the desire. It was so like the night she had imagined for her dream-man's first coming!

"Let me in—let me in!" he seemed to say, knocking against her heart.

And as she fought the obsession there was an actual rap at the door. It toned so uncannily with her visionings that her first impulse was to run and bolt the door against the dear vision which was becoming stronger than she. But as the imperative knock came a second time her common sense made her cross slowly to the door and throw it open.

"I've lost my way, I'm afraid," said a man's quick, pleasant voice from behind the wall of snow the wind had heaped smoothly up to the very door-

handle. A spray of pine lay on the top of the drift, Ruth had time to notice, before the stranger struggled through it. "May I come in? The snow has stopped, but—I'm afraid I've got to rest a minute before I can go on."

She could only see a straight dark shape in the dusk. Even yet she was scarcely certain whether the hallucination was not finally conquering her. But "Come in," she said in a frightened voice. And the man pushed himself through the snow and across the threshold.

He was tall. His dripping hair curled a little under his cap. He was so heavily tanned that it made his eyes seem a brighter blue than they actually were. Ruth's heart beat wildly. He was real—yes, that was certainly real snow that dripped from him in water on the floor—and yet—he was like the dream-man.

Ruth's expert-accountant side took the helm again. "If he's a hallucination I may as well go on with it till he's through," it said; "if he's a real man I ought to help him. So either way—"

The dream-man pushed the door shut behind him, pulled off his wet cap and laughed a little.

"I'm afraid I'm too wet to be anything but a nuisance," he said. "But may I try to dry out a

little by the fire? And thank you for letting me take shelter."

"Oh, yes, please come near the fire," she said shyly, and watched him fascinatedly as he moved close to the blazing logs and half-knelt beside them. Just so she had imagined her dream-man kneeling by the fire a hundred times! She took a sudden resolution. It was only kind, after all—the thing she was going to do.

"In—in that room there," she faltered, one hand playing nervously with her necklace, "you'll find dry clothes, and—I think—everything you want." She pointed to the dream-man's room.

He rose from beside the fire and smiled at her. Ruth's heart lifted sharply—his look and gestures were so like the dream-man's still!

"Thank you," he said, and entered the door she held open for him. She thought she heard him exclaim as the door shut. She heard him moving hurriedly about, changing, she supposed. Then there was silence for a little.

Ruth bent to the phonograph. She laughed at herself for being so foolish. Yet—she adjusted the disk and set it softly playing. Its first sounds were drowned by the hasty flinging open of a door.

"What does it mean?" demanded the stranger,

striding over to her. He had dressed himself, Ruth noted hastily, in the white clothes from the wardrobe, and *they fitted him*. Her eyes were shining and his forehead was knit in perplexity. "What does it mean?" he asked again passionately. "That's my room, or it might as well be. Those are my books, nearly all of them, in the case—my pictures on the wall—you've even got alpenstocks crossed over the mantel the way mine are."

Ruth put her hand over her heart, which was misbehaving now worse than it had at all, though it had worried her a good deal lately.

"Do you mean—do you mean *you* have a room like that—somewhere?" she panted.

"Yes," said the stranger. Then he pulled himself together. "I beg your pardon for being so excited about it, but it certainly was queer. The fellow that owns that room must be my other self . . . it certainly is curious—almost exactly the room I have, even to the mechanical drawing instruments and the frame where I keep my mother's picture on the bureau—only *his* frame hasn't any picture in it."

He sat down opposite her in the dream-man's chair, and bent over to pat the dog's head. "By Jove, it was funny—like the things you read about

in a fairy-book!" he said. "Is it your husband?" he asked frankly, "the chap with tastes like mine?"

He waited eagerly for her answer. There was only one thing to say, or so it seemed to Ruth.

"My—my husband," she replied faintly.

"Oh, yes, of course," said the stranger in a strained voice. "Your husband, of course."

A little silence fell after that. The man's blue eyes were fixed on the rug at his feet. Ruth watched his brown, strong face, shadowed as it had not been before she spoke. She broke the silence nervously.

"How did you come to be out on such a dreadful night?" she asked. Unconsciously her voice softened as if she were speaking to her own veritable dream-man.

He smiled again, with a flashing of white teeth.

"I don't know," he confessed. "It was a silly thing to do. I acted on one of those queer impulses that you get up and follow sometimes before you know what you've done. I'd been doing some mountain-climbing in the Far East—I generally spend my vacation that way—and one of those see-America-first ideas struck me so hard that I came back here. And nothing would do but that I should go exploring before I'd been ten minutes in the

hotel, even. And I had a strange feeling—ever have it?—that something awfully good was at the end of the journey. I used to have it when I was a kid sometimes—that there was a corking surprise waiting for me at the end. So I was day-dreaming, I suppose, as I walked, and didn't notice how excessively lost I was getting, or how high the snow was piling. I was about all in when I saw your light."

He stopped and leaned back in his chair as if he were not only tired, but a little down-hearted about something. Ruth saw, now, that he was older than she had thought. There was gray in his hair, and his face, when he did not smile, was sharper cut than she had imagined. He was thirty-five, at a guess, and some of the years had been hard ones.

He was so like the dream-man—so very like! Ruth longed to kneel by him and slip her bare arm round his neck and whisper, "I am sorry you are tired—I am sorry there was no wonderful thing at the end of your journey—but you have me still, remember, dear!"

But he was real, and a stranger, and she had told him she was married.

"You must be hungry and thirsty!" was all she could find to say. "I will get you something."

She fled to the kitchen, and made chocolate and

broiled meat and prepared salad and creamed potatoes with quick, shaking hands, while her heart beat suffocatingly, agonizingly. She had to lean against the door to catch her breath. In an incredibly short time she had the food on a tray, on a little table beside the stranger. He lifted the chocolate to his lips, thanking her, and drank off the contents of the little cup. Then he lifted his wrist to the level of his eyes, as if something had pricked him.

“That’s a price-mark!” he said, jerking the bit of pasteboard from his sleeve. “This suit has never been worn. And neither had any of the other things I put on. Ah, tell me——”

Ruth lifted both tremulous hands toward him, mutely begging him to stop. He caught her wrists, bringing her hands nearer to him, examining them closely.

“What does it mean?” he said vehemently. “And you have no wedding-ring on—why did you say you were married?”

It never occurred to Ruth to question his right to ask her, or to wonder what it all was to him. She was overwrought already by the strain and excitement of his coming, and—though she did not realize it—the work and unhappiness of the lonely months before.

"I will tell you—I will!" she said panting.
"Only don't look so!"

"I haven't any right to ask, I know," he said in a softened voice. "But if you *will*—"

He broke off confusedly, with his blue eyes fixed on Ruth hungrily, beseechingly.

"I was so lonely," she falteringly began, "so very lonely! And I have never had time to play, nor been where there was any one to play with me . . ."

"I know," he said softly; and the understandingness of his voice gave her courage to go on. She lifted her eyes to his.

"I bought this phonograph for Celia," she said, "and it played one night, '*Oh, Mr. Dream-man.*' . . ."

The story was not so hard to tell as she had thought it was going to be. But it was hard enough, at that—the story of the loneliness that had become desperation and had finally made her build a lover out of dreams—of how the dream had become so real that she had furnished the room for him, and dressed herself as she had thought he would love to see her.

He said nothing. He only stood and listened to her with a deepening light on his face. His eyes

were fixed on hers. Ruth flung away from him with a cry.

"Oh, I am ashamed!" she said. "It was such a foolish, foolish thing to do!"

She laid her arms on the mantel, and her head on them. She did not cry—she was too heartsick for the relief of tears. She shuddered as if a cold wind were blowing over her.

She heard her dream-man's voice behind her at length, speaking softly.

"Let us try the charm again," he said. She heard him, through her shamed misery, at the phonograph. The music began to play again, softly and scratchily. . . . "Oh, *Mr. Dream-man*"

She heard him move behind her. His hand was laid on her shoulder—so like the firm, warm hand of her dreams!

"You called me," he said gently. "Don't you believe it, my dear? You must have called me all the way from over there. . . . You must have been very lonely, my poor little girl! And I—I have been lonely, too, always."

Ruth lifted her face and stared at him. What was there in the sound of the words that he was saying?

He came close and put his arms around her.

"It is true, is it not?" he said. "And, Ruth, I don't see why either of us ever need be lonely again."

"*Oh, Mr. Dream-man!*" crooned the forgotten phonograph, "*please let me dream some mo'!*"

"I shall never be lonely any more!" whispered Ruth, laying her head on his shoulder. She closed her eyes, for, though she was perfectly happy, she was very tired.

• • • • •
Mrs. Cooley-down-the-road, clumping faithfully through the snowdrifts next morning toward her regular Friday cleaning of the bungalow, exclaimed fretfully, "Holy Mary!" at the sight of the blown-open door.

"I'll be a good half-hour cleanin' away the snow-wreaths on the door itself," she grumbled as she plowed through the untouched mound of snow that was heaped door-handle high, with a spray of pine on its top.

The crouching collie whined at the sight of her, and ran to her catching her skirt in his teeth and tugging at it. And Mrs. Cooley, standing in the middle of the snow-wreaths, screamed. For, by the mantel, beyond a little table set with untouched food and drink for two, half-stood, half-leaned Ruth.

She was clad in blue silk with blue beads around her neck and bracelets on her wrists, and her hair was waved and carefully dressed. Although her half-hidden lips smiled and her cheeks were faintly tinted still, Mrs. Cooley could see that she was dead.

The old Irishwoman shuddered and crossed herself. "Aye, it did always be risky work, settin' out the place an' the clothes an' the food for *Them*. But the Lord knows I couldn't be sayin' anything." She shuddered again, and went reluctantly up the stairs to Celia. She never looked back. But vivid in her mind still was the picture of the crisp maline of Ruth's shoulder-knot; marked in five ridges as by the strong pressure of a loving hand.

DEVIL'S HALL

IT was rather late in the afternoon for them to be out walking so far from home, Cousin Quincy and Naomi, but Mother knew where they had gone. At least they pretended to each other that they thought she did.

In October most of the summer people had gone away from Allenwood, across the lake from the Park, and their beautiful big houses, all set about with box hedges and flowered lawns, were left alone. If you went up there then with a basket and scissors you could always bring home lots of nasturtiums that would maybe keep on growing, and red-and-yellow leaves like the ones that made the letters at the station. And once they found a kitten, a little gray kitten, that was so starved and gaunt and heart-breaking that they had to hurry home with it as fast as ever they could, so as not to cry out loud about it before they got there.

So this afternoon, while Mother was dashing around trying to get to her Ladies' Aid in time, Naomi had suggested to Cousin Quincy that it

would be nice to cross the bridge to Allenwood and get her some flowers.

“Can I take Cousin Quincy out to hunt flowers, Mother?” Naomi asked, and Mother was in such a Ladies’ Aid hurry that she never asked where. She just said, “All right, sweetheart. Be good children and don’t go far,” and hurried off, and they took the big basket and went as straight as they could over the Allenwood bridge.

There was a long stretch of the emptied houses along the side of the lake, with now and then one that somebody lived in all winter. This made it very heart-beating and adventurous, because you never could tell which mightn’t be a lived-in house, with some one to call out of an unexpected window, “Go away, you children!” very crossly.

Quincy had the trowel. Naomi ought to have carried it, because she was seven and he was only six, but today she had been absent-minded, and he had pounced on it. She let him have it, because she knew he would sit down flat if she insisted on her rights, and she was in a special hurry to get to Allenwood. The truth was, she was carrying a Dark Secret that day instead of the trowel—a Dark Secret and a Quest. She was looking for Devil’s Hall.

When deacons came to see Father you could always be sure of hearing something interesting if you sat mousy-quiet and let them forget you were there. This had been a very vehement deacon, the one who told Father about the Devil's Hall.

"They call it the Devil's Hall down in the village," said the deacon quite unmistakably, pounding the armchair hard, "and it looks it. Respectably-married couple," he went on louder, "and every minute he's out of the house she does exactly what she pleases—carouses with all the riff-raff in town, and she only nineteen, and he not much older."

Nineteen seemed quite old to Naomi, but the deacon seemed to think it was young. Naomi wondered how old he was. Ninety, maybe.

"And what about him?" asked Father, pulling his eyebrows together.

"It's her money he's living on," said the deacon quite growly-ways, "and he doesn't care as long as he can bum around town on it. Lets her do anything she's a-mind to."

Here Naomi had forgotten herself and asked, "What does she a-mind to, Deacon?" So, of course, Father sent her out flying on an errand he knew Naomi knew was made-up. She was sorry, because the deacon looked as if he was just going

to pound again. But, anyway, she had enough to go on, so she arranged things as quick as she could to go see, Mother being in a hurry to get to the Ladies' Aid and all.

"What do you think it looks like?" asked Quincy when they were well on their way, and Naomi had told him all about it. Naomi felt doubtful.

"I don't know," she said. "Something like the Pilgrim's Progress, maybe."

"Or the Purgletory Book?" said Quincy, getting excited. The big Dante with the Doré illustrations was his pet picture-book. "Little round pavement-holes to poke people down—do you s'pose it would be *hot*, Cousin?"

"No," Naomi said hastily. She was afraid she would frighten him, and, to tell the truth, she felt a little creepy about those Doré manholes herself. But Quincy was not frightened, it appeared, only hungry for sensations.

"Maybe there'll be legs sticking out of the holes, anyway," he mused hopefully. "Oh, Cousin, here's a splendid lawn!"

They both forgot all about their unholy quest, because about this time they happened on a gorgeous house with beds and beds of nasturtiums for all who sought, and a great bushful of red-and-yellow chry-

santhemums which Naomi robbed so valiantly that next day there were two vases full for Mother and lots left for Father's sick people. After that Quincy wanted to play he was a train of cars, all up and down the big empty porch, using the pillars for stations. Naomi never could do anything with Cousin Quincy, so she sauntered back into the garden, not to waste time, and played that she was a princess with golden curls. Every little while she would try to detach Cousin Quincy from his railroad, but it was nearly dark before she could coax him to come away from the porch and on home. It was quicker to go on and across the lower bridge than to go back.

But all the big, empty, shadowy houses looked suddenly as if they didn't like them, and would do frightening things to them if they could—and as if perhaps they *could*. Naomi caught Quincy's hand, and he held hers tight, and they hurried a little faster and began to talk about all the warm, home, lighted things they knew, the fire and supper and the collie, and what Mother would say. They did not talk any more, either of them, about Devil's Hall. But all the empty houses looked as if they might—just *might*—and it got relentlessly darker, and they hurried on a little faster still. It felt as if

Mother and the fire and the collie were hundreds of miles away, instead of a scant half-mile.

They were almost to the bridge when Quincy gave a tug away from Naomi's hand, and went on alone in brave masculine independence. Naomi looked the way he was looking, and then she felt all cheered up, and as if Mother and the bread-and-milk were certainties, not vague incredible hopes. There was a lovely white stucco house sitting up gallantly between two darkened ones, all lighted like the parsonage when there was a sociable. Naomi took a long look and prepared to go on again. But not so Quincy.

"Want-a-drink-o'-water!" he proclaimed, making straight for the drive of the lighted house. Naomi liked the bright lights as much as he did, but she wanted to get home.

"Aw, *no* you don't, Quincy," she coaxed. "No you don't. You just think you do. Don't you want to get back and have hot cocoa and bread-and-milk? You don't want a drink."

"Want-a-drink-o'-water!" insisted Quincy unconvincing, showing signs of sitting down flat. So she gave in, and followed him up the drive, up the steps to the door, nearly as frightened of the asking for a drink as she would have been of the dark.

She was shy and besides she thought the people might take them for beggars and be cross to them.

Quincy found the bell and held it a long time. Naomi could feel him straightening out his company manners there in the dark. Cousin Quincy had been born with a complete set of perfect manners which he could use whenever they were needed. Naomi was very proud of them, because her own were painfully handmade, and sometimes buried by shyness when she wanted them the worst.

The door opened.

"I beg your pardon," said Cousin Quincy, with his yellow-brown curls scarcely level to the door-knob as he took off his cap with a sweep, "but can I ask you for a drink-o'-water?"

The big gray-haired Irish maid at the door looked down on him with affectionate admiration. People generally did look at little Cousin Quincy that way, till they had charge of him for a day.

"Ye can indeed," she said, "and the little girl with ye. Come into the hall, childer, it's cold standin' outside."

"I am Pastor Ainslie's little nephew, and this is Naomi," volunteered Quincy sedately as they slid thankfully into the warm brightness.

"A priest's childer, is it?" she said, by which

Naomi knew that she was a Roman Catholic and felt sorry for her. She did not say anything, though. It's rude to try to convert people unless you know them quite well, and she was shy, besides. "Well, priest's children or no, ye've pretty manners and a pretty face, darlin'. Come in, both of ye, an' get yer drink."

But before they could follow her a crowd of people cascaded from the dining-room (the children could see the table back of them) and out into the hall where they stood.

Of course, Mother was the prettiest lady in the world. Father said so, and you could see it for yourself besides. But the Big Girl who was running out of the dining-room in the middle of ever so many big boys was undoubtedly a more exciting person to look at. They placed her as a Big Girl, not a grown-up lady, because she was running, and because all her beautiful doll-colored hair was all in a twist down her back with hairpins sticking in it, as if she had been trying to pin it up, they thought, and couldn't. She had bright pink cheeks and very red lips and her eyelashes were like a doll's too, all flary and black, with funny, pretty bead things on the ends. Naomi felt a little hurt to think Mother hadn't any beads on her lashes. In between the Big

Girl was very white, nose and forehead and chin. But her face looked like a little girl's somehow, underneath; not as grown-up as Quincy's looked, even, when he was thinking hard. The boys with her were dressed all sorts of mussy-ways, two in sweaters and one in a shirtwaist and trousers, and one in a dress-suit. But the Big Girl had on the sort of a dress Naomi had always intended to buy herself when she was a Big Girl, too. It was pink satin with a low neck and short sleeves and a trail, and—yes—even to the pink satin slippers her dream was complete! Just that way she had always been going to come down to breakfast when she was old enough and had money. She was glad somebody else had that much sense. It always seemed strange to her that Mother never should.

“*Cousin!*” whispered Quincy loudly, pulling Naomi's dress. “Are they a Bible Class?”

Naomi couldn't see why they all laughed as loud as ever they could. It wasn't polite, and besides, she had been wondering herself whether they were a Bible Class or a Brotherhood. You had to keep Bible Classes and Brotherhoods up with Sociables or they fell off—anybody knew that much. (Naomi never found out where they fell to, though she used to wonder.)

"Sure, we're a Bible Class, kiddies," said the big one in the red sweater, the one who should have shaved before he came. "We're Dimples' Bible Class—aren't we, Dimples?"

Everybody laughed again, and looked at the Big Girl, but she only gave them all little pushes and slaps, and then made a swoop and hugged Quincy.

"Aren't they the *sweetest?*?" she said; and her little-girl face looked younger than ever. "Who are you, children? Where'd they come from, Honoria?"

"They came askin' a drink for the boy, Miss Dorothy," the big gray-haired maid answered shortly.

"Aren't they *dears?*?" said the Big Girl again, keeping her arm around Quincy, who bore it politely, only stiffening a little. "What are your first names, little girl?"

Naomi told her. "And if Quincy could just have a drink we won't bother you any more," she said worriedly, for she could see the dark through the door-lace, racing to get things black all over, before Quincy got his drink. "He *would* come in."

"So he *shall* come in," said the Big Girl, unbuttoning his reefer quickly, and throwing it and his cap on the floor, then starting on Naomi. "He

shall have a drink and some cakies and be my little sweetheart! Get the bowl and the glasses now, Nora dear, and the cakes, and bring them straight into the parlor this minute."

Naomi approved of that Big Girl. She was doing something else *she'd* always wanted to do: having things when you wanted them instead of waiting for the proper time. And all you wanted. She watched Quincy and Naomi eat the cakes the way you watch a kitten drink milk. They were beautiful pink and yellow confectionery cakes, the very-dear kind Mother couldn't afford. Then she got Quincy his drink herself. He only took a tiny bit. Naomi had known perfectly well he wasn't thirsty, only wanted to get in out of the dark!

"Don't you want some of this, too?" said the Big Girl, running over to the big glass bowl Honoria had brought in, all full of red lemonade. Indeed they did, both of them. It was much better than water, or even cocoa. It had a lovely, unexpected taste. After they had it Naomi felt suddenly very quiet, and like going into a corner and sitting down and watching everything. It seemed to her as if she could hear and see and smell everything much better, only it was all like a picture, somehow, not real exactly. So she sat down on a hassock off in

the corner and watched the picture go on, especially the Big Girl and Quincy. They seemed to like each other very much. The red lemonade hadn't made him quiet or sleepy at all, which was queer, because it was getting near his bedtime. His cheeks were all flushed, almost as pink as the Big Girl's, only a different color, somehow, and his brown eyes were like stars. He and the Big Girl were chattering away to each other with all the boys around them. Some were standing and smoking, and some were on the floor smoking, and two were smoking on the arms of the Big Girl's chair, with their own arms back of her close.

One of them came over and began to talk to Naomi, but he talked as if she were a ridiculous little thing, and she didn't feel like bothering to speak, somehow. So she didn't answer much, and he went away, and Naomi kept on watching things happen like a big talking picture-book. The Big Girl had one of the boys start the phonograph, and then they danced in a sort of ring, going two ways and changing hands, some of the boys with handkerchiefs on their arms, making ridiculous noises and pretending to be girls. That was very funny. The Big Girl had Quincy dance, too, and showed him how. Then they sat down again, and Quincy

sang for them. He wouldn't always do that for people. He sang "I'm a Little Pilgrim" and "A Kitten Once to Its Mother Said."

While he was in the middle of the singing, going ahead as fast and as loud as you could possibly want, and they clapping their hands and laughing at him, another boy came in. He slid in softly, as if he didn't belong there as much as the rest did. He was thin and a little tired-looking, with eyes as big as Naomi's and Quincy's, only set way deep. He sat down quietly a little behind the rest. The Big Girl didn't make a fuss over him the way she had over the others. She jerked her shoulder at him as if she was cross, and began to talk very fast and low to another boy to make him laugh.

The boy closest to Naomi snickered a little.

"There's the Master-of-the-House again," he said, low, and the one he said it to snickered too. So Naomi supposed that was another joke, like the Bible Class.

Quincy finished singing. He had done splendidly, as loud as loud, and never a word forgotten. Naomi was proud of him.

"Well, you *are* a clever little devil," said one of the boys, reaching out and patting at him. Quincy jerked away.

"That a-minds me," he said very quickly so they wouldn't notice the jerk.

"What a-minds you, you cunning thing?" asked the Big Girl.

"About the devil. I want to find Devil's Hall. So does Naomi. It's up here. Naomi heard a deacon tell her farver."

Everybody began to laugh again, very loud, as if what he said was awfully funny, funnier than about the Bible Class.

"What's it look like, kiddy?" asked the boy in the red sweater.

"I don't know," said Quincy. "Naomi fought it was like Pilgrim's Progress, with little pointy flames under the door. I fought it was like my Purgletory Book. That has holes and fire and legs sticking up, and curly devils poking in the legs wiv forks. An' there's people in it, married. She's only nineteen, but she has riff-raffs very badly. And he has her purse, wiv all her money in it, so all he cares is to bun around town," finished Quincy, repeating Naomi conscientiously. "How do you bun, Miss Dimples?" he broke off to ask the Big Girl. "Is it nice?"

But the Big Girl had been biting hard to keep her mouth stiff all the time Quincy was telling about it.

When he stopped she just let go. She turned and gave the two boys on the arms of her chair two, quick, cross, temper-pushes and jerked herself around so her face was against the velvet chair-back, and suddenly cried and cried and *cried*. Her shoulders, all white out of the lovely pink satin gown, shook hard, and her long rope of doll-colored hair came more untwisted and hung down nearly loose.

Then suddenly Naomi found why the sweater-boy had called the tired one the Master-of-the-House. It was because he *was*. He walked up by her chair so fast you scarcely saw him get there, into the middle of the boys, right by Quincy, who was watching and looking uncomfortable but interested. But that was the way they all looked.

The Master-of-the-House dropped his hand down quick on the Big Girl's shoulder.

"Go home, you fellows," he said in a quick, deep-down sort of a way Naomi thought was rude. He stood there straight and stiff with his eyes burrowing way into them. He kept on standing and she kept on crying, and nobody said anything, but began to slide out in the mousy-quietest way.

That is, all but one. The big boy in the red sweater stayed. He laughed a little.

"Go, if you please," said the Master-of-the-House. It sounds polite, but it wasn't, the way he said it. The sweater-boy stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Waiting for Dimples," he said impudently. "She's going for a little trip with me tonight. Might as well break it to you now as any time. Come on, honey. He wants your house to himself."

"Dorothy!" said the Master-of-the-House as if something had hurt him.

"No, no, no!" she said.

Naomi never knew which she said it to. The sweater-boy ran over to her and dropped down by the chair and began to talk fast. He looked very handsome, but black-catty, somehow. "Come, honey," he said. "Come now—what do you care?"

"No—no—I won't after all!" she said from against the chair-back.

"He doesn't care for you," he said. "I told you. He never had any use for anybody but Marge Stuart. He married you to get back at her. I told you!" he said.

She gave a sort of little moan at that.

"I'll go—I'll go!" she said, and started to get up.

But the Master's hand on her shoulder was holding her down.

"You brute!" said the Master-of-the-House. "Is that the way you did it? Get out of this place before I throw you out!"

The sweater-boy lifted himself and started to go, for anybody would unless they were very brave, the way the Master looked. But he stopped at the door.

"It's true enough," he said sulkily. "And you might as well let her go now as any time. She needs somebody to be good to her, poor kid!"

"You'd better go," said the Master-of-the-House softly and coming up to him close.

So he went and the door clicked shut behind him.

The Master-of-the-House came back and stood over her again.

"It isn't true!" he said.

"Isn't it, Laurie?" she said from the chair-back. "They all said so—they told me—all the time! Girls and all. If it's true I shall go. Not with Jack, maybe, but I'll go! Oh, Laurie, I didn't mind when I thought it was the money. Lots of people marry for money. But Marge——" She began to sob softly again.

He looked as if he had made up his mind to do something dreadful. He started to speak twice be-

fore he could. At last he did speak, in a queer, stiff voice.

"I guess I'd better tell the truth, Dorothy. It wasn't the money. It *was* Margaret Stuart. But oh, Dorothy, it—it isn't, any more! It is *you*. Dorothy, couldn't you forgive me, or just—stay with me a little longer, and think it over? Just a little while! Because—I don't suppose you can believe it—but it *is* you, now."

She didn't say anything. But she slipped her hand out where his could get it if he wanted it.

He did. He almost pounced on it, and held it tight with both his hands. And she held tight, too, and cried some more.

"If you really—cared!" she said, all muffled still.

You never saw anything so surprised as he looked.

"Dorothy!" he said. "You don't—mean—you could—care for me!"

He dropped down on his knees beside the chair, and reached out and pulled her head round to his shoulder instead of the chair-back.

She kept right on crying while he turned her, and Naomi saw her face, all screwed up, and more like a little girl's than ever. One cheek wasn't pink any more, and the other was all cry-streaks. But the

Master-of-the-House didn't mind. He only kept on saying over and over—

"My poor little girl! My poor little girl! Did you care as much as that?" and patting her shoulder steadily as if she was a baby.

"I thought you didn't want me!" she said.

Of course it all came out mixed with crying, but Naomi could tell what she meant, and so could the Master-of-the-House. "I thought you didn't care and I tried to make you care and you wouldn't, and I thought you didn't *want* me!"

She said that over and over again, too. Naomi could see his arms pull round her so tight they nearly sank in.

"Want you!" he said. "Because I hadn't any business to say anything—because it was all your money!"

They both began to talk at once, telling each other that they *did* want each other. They were not paying any attention to Quincy, so he had strayed off to a table where there was another plate of the lovely cakes, and was eating lots more without asking. Then he yawned and looked around for a sofa. Naomi knew what *that* meant. If Quincy once got to sleep you couldn't waken him till morning. You had to walk him to bed that way.

But it was so hard for Naomi to move and stop the far-off picture-book feeling that he was actually on the sofa and nearly fast asleep before she could get over to him and pry him off and walk him to the hall door.

She looked back a little as they marched out. The Big Girl and the Master-of-the-House were still holding tight and saying, "I do! I do! I do!" and "Never! Never! Never!" They must have wanted each other very much.

Looking over her shoulder that way, Naomi ran Quincy almost straight into Honoria, who must have been listening. Maids do, Mother had told her. They don't know why they shouldn't. She had been crying, too, till there was a big cata-corner piece of her apron all wet and crumpled. These people struck Naomi as being different from the ones she usually saw. They cried more. But you're always coming across new kinds of people when you're seven.

"You're the only grown-up person here, aren't you?" Naomi asked her, as nicely as she could.

Honoria seemed very easily surprised.

"It's heaven's own truth," she said. "I'm the only grown person that is in the house or iver was,

unless it might be yer two little old-fashioned selves."

"Would you mind taking us home, then?" Naomi said. "Quincy won't wake up again to-night, and it takes somebody big to walk him over the curbs and round the corners when he's asleep."

"Take ye home?" said Honoria. "Av course I'll take ye home. 'Tis a small thing to be doin' fer a guardien angel an' his sister!"

She buttoned Quincy expertly into his reefer and dropped his cap on just right, while Naomi put her own hat and jacket on. Then Honoria got her own things, and took Quincy by the shoulder and Naomi by the hand, and they started for home.

When the outside air struck Quincy he woke a little.

"Want go Devil's Hall!" he said crossly.
"Want see *legs* stickin' up!"

"Whisht, darlin'!" said Honoria, guiding him down the steps as cleverly as if she had walked little boys in their sleep all her life. "I don't think ye'll iver see any Devil's Hall over here, ner any legs stickin' up, foriver an' iver amen. An' ye've only yersilf to blame."

Naomi did not see how he was to blame at all. She was going to tell Honoria so. But as she picked

him up and kissed him hard as soon as she said it, she evidently did not think he was so very bad. So Naomi held to her skirt and said nothing at all.

But though they looked and looked the next time they went up that way, Quincy and Naomi, and Quincy called on Honoria and got to be great friends with her by and by, she was quite right. They never did find any Devil's Hall.



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